KARAKURI CIRCUS

6

KAZUHIRO FUJITA

DELCOURT

KARAKURI CIRCUS

6

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★ SUMMARY OF THE PREVIOUS VOLUMES ★

A YOUNG BOY NAMED MASARU SAIGA INHERITED A HUGE FORTUNE WHEN HIS FATHER DIED. HE'S PROTECTED BY SHIROGANE, A MYSTERIOUS GIRL WHO HANDLES A GIANT PUPPET NAMED ARLEQUIN. ONE DAY, MASARU IS ONCE AGAIN DIRECTLY IMPLICATED IN AN ABDUCTION CASE DUE TO HIS INHERITANCE. MASARU DECIDES TO LEAVE HIS SCHOOL AND TOWN WITH SHIROGANE AFTER THE VIOLENT EVENTS THAT FOLLOWED, WISHING TO NOT BE A SOURCE OF PROBLEMS FOR HIS SCHOOLMATES ANYMORE. SO THAT HE WON'T GET INVOLVED IN SHADY BUSINESS AGAIN, THEY LIVE "ON THE ROAD" WITH THE VERY KIND MEMBERS OF THE NAKAMACHI FAMILY, WHO WERE CIRCUS PERFORMERS IN THE PAST. BUT MASARU HAS YET TO REVEAL HIS REASONS FOR RUNNING AWAY TO THEM.
THEN TARANDA LISELOTTE APPEARS BEFORE THEM. SHE IS A YOUNG GIRL WHO IS ALSO A TAMER OF FEROCIOUS BEASTS AND IS FOLLOWED BY HER LION, NAMED DRUM. SHE CHASES A GIANT TIGER NAMED BEAST, FAMOUS FOR HIS FEROCITY, WHO HAS ALREADY KILLED LOTS OF PEOPLE. RESOLVED TO DIE IN ORDER TO KILL THE MONSTER, TARANDA PROUDLY FACES BEAST. ITS THE ONLY WAY FOR HER TO FREE HERSELF FROM THE MEMORY OF HER TWIN SISTER, BESIDE WHOM SHE WAS ALWAYS THE UNDERDOG. MASARU, WANTING TO SAVE TARANDA AGAINST HER WILL, DECIDED TO FIGHT AGAINST BEAST AS WELL. AFTER REGAINING HER SELF CONFIDENCE, THANKS TO MASARU'S CHEERING, TARANDA SUCCEEDED IN TAMING BEAST, WHO WAS KILLED BY DRUM IN THE END.

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■ KAZUHIRO FUJITA ■

GOOOH!

THE FIRE-MEN HAVE ARRIVED!

SURROUND THE BUILDING! BEAST MUSTN'T TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION TO ES-CAPE!

SUPERETTE

ACT III: CIRCUS * THE TAMER
PART EIGHT

"THE CURTAIN FALLS MOMENTARILY"

THIS TIGER IS A TRUE MONSTER! YOU'VE SEEN IT!

WAIT A SECOND! I THOUGHT YOU WERE SENT HERE TO LIMIT THE DAMAGE!?

...

IN FACT, YOU ONLY CALMLY OB-SERVED WHAT WAS GOING ON WITH YOUR ARMS CROSSED!

OH LA LAAA! WITH ALL THIS, THE CHIEF OF THE LOCAL POLICE DE-PARTMENT WILL BE FORCED TO RESIGN!

...THERE'S TOO MUCH DAMAGE AND TOO MANY VICTIMS!

THIS WAY!

EH!

TOKYO FIRE DEPARTMENT

SCHLAK

OH NO? YOU THINK!?

WHEN I ARRIVED, EVERYTHING HAD ALREADY BEGUN! THE INTERVENTION SHOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER ORGANIZED!

YOUR SPECIALTY... IT'S CONTORTION, NOT MAGIC...

WHERE DID YOU FIND THIS KEY?

I BORROWED IT FROM SOMEONE WHO LOOKED VERY BUSY.

BUT BEFORE THAT...

I'M WORRIED ABOUT MASARU. LET'S GO INTO THE SHOPPING CENTER.

HUH? ... WHAT!?

LET'S GO, MISTER NAKAMACHI.

GLOUPS

...DEAR "PROFES-SOR"!

YOU'LL COME WITH US...

SALE

SHUT UP! I'M JUST ASKING YOU TO FOLLOW US!

PSCHHH

GOO!

LET GO! STUPID!

I'M WARNING YOU, THE SECOND IN COMMAND OF THE NATIONAL POLICE IS ONE OF MY FRIENDS FROM COLLEGE!!

CONFIDENCE IN ONE'S SELF, THE ANIMALS FEEL IT PER-FECTLY... EVEN HER LION CAN FEEL IT!

WITH HER TIMID PERSON-ALITY, SHE'LL NEVER BEAT THE GENIUS *BEAST!*

I DON'T FEEL ANY-THING LIKE THAT FROM THIS GIRL'S PERSONALITY! SHE ALWAYS HAS HER EYES DOWN.

EVERY ONE WHO WORKS IN DIRECT CONTACT WITH ANIMALS HAS TO BELIEVE IN THEM SELF...

I ALREADY TOLD YOU, SEVERAL TIMES, THAT SHE'LL NEVER DO IT!

THEN YOU'LL BE ABLE TO TESTIFY THAT THIS GIRL KILLED *BEAST!!*

BOMF

BY THE WAY, THERE WAS NEVER A NEEDLE IN THAT LION'S TAIL! IT'S RIDICU-LOUS...

WHAT COULD HAPPEN? MIRACLES!? WHAT A JOKE! SCIEN-TISTS DON'T BELIEVE IN THAT KIND OF THING!

LISTEN! SOMETIMES, IN A CIRCUS...

HUH?

BUT... THERE ARE SOME-TIMES...

OUPS! ... SORRY!!

...MIRACLES IN A CIRCUS!

DOH!

THANK YOU...

IF I BEAT *BEAST*, IT'S THANKS TO YOU MASARU.

TARAN-DA!

YOU KNOW, TARANDA, YOU DID IT YOURSELF!

DRUM... WE SUCCEEDED AT LAST!

RRRH

I WONDERED WHY *BEAST* ATTACKED YOUR SISTER FIRST AND NOT YOU...

YES... FROM THE START.

...YOU DID?

...THAT YOU HAD AN UNBELIEVABLE CAPACITY TO TAME ANIMALS!

I SIMPLY AND SINCERELY BELIEVED...

...IT'S YOU THAT *BEAST* SHOULD HAVE ATTACKED, SINCE YOU GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT YOU'RE WEAK. WHY DIDN'T HE DO THAT?

AND YOU SAID THAT YOUR SISTER WAS LECTURING YOU ALL THE TIME. SO LOGICALLY ...

I TOLD MYSELF THAT IF I WAS A TIGER LIKE *BEAST*, I WOULD ATTACK SOMEONE WEAK FIRST...

DEEP INSIDE HIMSELF ...

...*BEAST* WAS AFRAID OF YOU!

THERE'S ONLY ONE POSSIBLE ANSWER.

HA HA HA! DAMN KID! IF YOU KNEW HOW WORRIED WE WERE!

MASTER, YOU'RE SAFE AND SOUND!

SHIROGANE! MISTER NAKAMACHI!

SO, YOU CAME HERE BECAUSE YOU BELIEVED IN THIS GIRL?

YES...

...IT'S COM-PLETELY LOGICAL.

...
HMM
...

OOH LA LA LA

IT'S UN-BELIEVABLE! THERE'S A NEEDLE AS HARD AS STEEL INSIDE HIS TAIL!

ROAR

...TAKE CARE OF IT.

BEAST HAS BEEN HIT DIRECTLY ON THE FOREHEAD! A CLEAN AND PRECISE HIT! WHEN I THINK THAT BEFORE, NEITHER BULLETS NOR POISON COULD...

THIS OLD LION AGAINST BEAST! ... THIS GIRL SUCCEEDED IN LAUNCHING AN OLD ANIMAL AGAINST THIS BLOODY MONSTER. DESPITE THE OBVIOUS DIFFERENCE IN PHYSICAL STRENGTH BETWEEN THE TWO CREATURES!

MISS...

THIS GIRL SUCCEEDED!

HUH ... BUT ...

I DIDN'T BELIEVE IN YOUR TALENT.

I OFFER YOU ALL MY EXCUSES.

I HUMBLY ADMIT MY MISTAKE...

... I ...

YOU ARE A SPLENDID ...

... FEROCIOUS ANIMAL TAMER!

I TOLD YOU, DIDN'T I?!

HE HE HE HE HE

Do you want to do some research with me?

KID, YOU HAVE ASTONISHING PERCEP-TION!

CHECK THIS OUT! OUR OLD PROFESSOR IS REALLY SENTIMENTAL!

POF

ZON

THE POLICE?

I'M CALLING THE POLICE IMMEDI-ATELY!

GAAH!

SHUT UP! STUPID AMATEUR!

AND...

GLUPS

NO! I'M CALLING THE POLICE!

I BEG YOU! THESE PEOPLE DIDN'T DO ANYTHING WRONG!

EVERY-THING'S MY FAULT...

...
PRAISEWORTHY BEHAVIOUR!!

...THAT YOU ALL HAD...

...THEN, I WILL CLEARLY EXPLAIN TO THEM...

WHAT DID YOU THINK?... THAT POOR PEOPLE HAVE A MONOPOLY ON KINDNESS? YOU THINK THAT IT'S A CHARACTER TRAIT THAT ONLY YOU HAVE!?

PFFF

YOU ARE A LOT MORE SENTIMENTAL THAN I THOUGHT!

HEY! PROFESSOR!

YOU JUST ADMITTED THAT YOU WERE WRONG...

CAISSE

PSCHHH

GOODBYE... AMATEURS!

GOOOHHH

WE HAVE TO GO TOO!

WELL...

...!

...TARANDA?

"YOU'RE REALLY USELESS!!"

HELEN ...

..."EVEN THOUGH IT'S OUR MOST DOCILE BEAST!"

"YOU CAN'T EVEN MAKE DRUM JUMP THROUGH THIS CIRCLE OF FIRE?!"

WHY DO YOU WANT TO DO THIS?

IT'S AN OCEAN OF FIRE!

WHAT?

GET OUT OF HERE THE OTHER WAY.

...I'LL GO THAT WAY.

...MAKE *DRUM* JUMP THROUGH A CIRCLE OF FIRE.

BECAUSE I COULDN'T ...

A LONG TIME AGO, MY SISTER LECTURED ME...

TODAY...

...I CAN DO IT!

MASTER... I DEMAND IT AS A PERSONAL FAVOUR...

SHIRO-GANE!

LET HER DO IT!

YOU SHOULDN'T DEPEND ON YOUR SISTER!

BUT WHY!?

...SHIRO-GANE.

THANKS A LOT...

NOW...

...WE HAVE TO CREATE THE "CIRCLE OF FIRE"!

SCHLAG!!

GOOHH

...WANT TO DO THIS SO BADLY?

WHY DOES TARANDA...

LISTEN BOY,

YOU'RE YOUNG, SO IT CAN BE HARD TO UNDER-STAND.

...FEEL THE NEED TO DO SOME THINGS, EVEN IF IT'S NOT LOGICAL.

SOMETIMES, ADULTS...

IS IT BECAUSE SHE CAN'T FORGET HER SISTER YET?

BLANGBLANG

SO LOUD ...

OUAH!

BLANG

SCHLA

SCHLA

SOMETHING IS HITTING THE TANK TRUCK.

BRG

SAH

CRASH

WHAT WAS THAT?!

IT'S YOUR GRAND "FINALE", TARANDA LISE-LOTTE!

THE CIRCLE OF FIRE IS READY!

YES!

BUT... I STILL WANT TO BE PART OF THE CIRCUS WORLD!

I WANTED SO MUCH TO LEARN OTHER THINGS FROM YOU ... BY JOINING YOU IN THE AFTERLIFE.

HELEN, KNOW THAT I'LL RESPECT YOU FOREVER...

DAAHH

LET'S GO!

...BY STAYING ALIVE!

SO, I'D RATHER GET CLOSER TO YOU...

...TO BE ALIVE!!

BECAUSE IT'S A LOT BETTER...

...CAN'T YOU, DRUM?

YOU CAN SEE DEEP IN MY HEART...

DRUM, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IF WE WERE PART OF THE NAKAMACHI CIRCUS?

... AND THANK YOU

FORGIVE ME DRUM...

BUT YOU WEREN'T ...

YOU KNOW... I ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT YOU WERE FOLLOWING ME TO AVENGE HELEN...

JUMP, DRUM

ZOOM

...
WHAT AN ARTIST!

MAR-
VEL-
OUS...

KARAKURI CIRCUS

I WANT HER IN MY CIRCUS!

INTERVAL:

"LITTLE PARTY WITH PUPPETS"

SCHHH

MISS LISELOTTE! OVER HERE PLEASE!

YES... BUT THE PEOPLE WHO HELPED ME WERE...

IS IT TRUE THAT THE POLICE DIDN'T WANT YOU TO INTERVENE AND EVEN TR ED TO DETA N YOU?

HUH ... YES ...

SO IT'S TRUE? YOU CAME, WITH YOUR LION, TO KILL *BEAST*, RIGHT?

HE HE ! RED PAINT

RRR

HA HA !! PLENTY OF SCREWS EVERY-WHERE

!!!

WHILE WE TOOK THE TRUCK DRIVER TO THE HOSPITAL ...

...WE HEARD YOU HAD TROUBLE WITH THE POLICE, AND THEN WE LEARNED THAT BEAST HAD BEEN KILLED!

WE WERE EXTREMELY WORRIED ABOUT YOU!

HMM

YES ... BOSS.

IF WE DON'T TAKE GOOD CARE OF OUR EQUIPMENT, ONE DAY IT'LL BETRAY US.

YOU'RE REPAIRING YOUR PUPPET, SHIROGANE? THAT'S SOME HARD WORK ...

POF

IN A LOT OF THE JAPANESE CIRCUSES THAT I KNOW, THEY DON'T TAKE CARE OF THEIR EQUIPMENT AS WELL AS YOU DO,

AND IT'S DANGEROUS ...

YOU CALLED ME "BOSS"?

YES ...

ME!?

CERTAINLY NOT!!

YOU SEEM DISCOURAGED, MISTER NAKAMACH! ...

YOU THINK I'M ONE?

THE BRAT HAS ALREADY FALLEN ASLEEP?

YES. I THINK MASTER WAS VERY TIRED...

SCRATCH SCRATCH SCRATCH

...
"DISCOUR-AGED"
...

I'VE BEEN IN THE CIRCUS FOR FORTY YEARS! AND FOR A WHILE, I EVEN DIRECTED ONE... SO, AFTER HAVING DONE ALL THAT, I CAN'T BE...

YES... MASTER IS VERY STRONG... INSIDE

HE HAS THE AUDACITY OF TRUE ARTISTS!

I ADMIT THAT I WAS SURPRISED... I THOUGHT OF HIM AS THE SON OF A GOOD FAMILY, A LITTLE WEAK AND AF-FECTED. BUT...

WELL, IT'S NORMAL ... PEOPLE SAY THAT HE FACED THAT HUGE MAN-EATING TIGER BARE-HANDED!

...

...

HA HA HA ! ... SHE ALREADY HAS A CONTRACT WITH ONE OF THE BIGGEST INTER-NATIONAL CIRCUSES!

SHE TOLD ME THAT SHE WANTED TO BECOME A MEMBER OF YOUR CIRCUS ...

I THINK IT'S NORMAL... SHE SUCCEEDED IN KILLING *BEAST* WHEN THE POLICE WERE TOTALLY OVERTAKEN BY THE CIRCUM-STANCES...

MISS LISELOTTE SUDDENLY BECAME FAMOUS!

THE PRESS AND THE MEDIA TALK OF NOTHING BUT HER!

WHY ...

WOULD SHE WANT TO JOIN A SMALL CIRCUS,

THAT HAS AN UNCER-TAIN FUTURE?

... WHAT'S THAT?

POF

POF

A SMALL STUFFED ANIMAL THAT SOMEONE THREW ON THE BEACH.

AH! THE KIND OF CHEAP GIFT THAT YOU BUY IN FAIRS ...

... HUH?! WHAT?!

... "CHEAP"? ME? WATCH YOUR TONGUE! I'M A SILVER FOX OF THE NOBLEST ANCESTRY!

HOP!

FWAAH... WHAT'S UP, MY LITTLE FOX?

THE OLD FOOL HERE SAID THAT I'M A "CHEAP" TOY!

BUT, SHIROGANE ... WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

ARLEQUIN! EH, ARLEQUIN!

BUT LOOK AT HIM! AND HE SMELLS!!

MY LITTLE FOX, YOU HAVE TO BE CAREFUL OF WHAT YOU'RE SAYING! HE'S NOT THAT OLD AND CERTAINLY NOT CRAZY!

WHY'S IT, "OLD FOOL" !? ... WAIT A SECOND, SHIROGANE !

DON'T YOU THINK HE'S DISCOURAGED ARLEQUIN?

OH... WAIT A MOMENT SHIROGANE... YOU GOT ME GOOD WITH YOUR PUPPETS ...

IT WOULD BE NORMAL, MY LITTLE FOX!

DIRTY LITTLE VERMIN! HOW DARE YOU SAY THAT I LOOK DISCOURAGED!?

HE LOOKS LIKE AN OLD GRANDPA, OVERTAKEN BY THE EVENTS! HE'S COMPLETELY DISCOURAGED AND HE'S AFRAID OF SOMETHING ..

AND HE DOESN'T HAVE ANY MONEY!! ITS VERY BAD!!

OOHH, YESSS!! HIS PRECIOUS TENT!!

THIS MAN HASN'T GOT MUCH MONEY LEFT! AND A LITTLE WHILE AGO...

.. HE LOST HIS HOUSE, AND HIS CIR-CUS TENT WAS CON-FISCATED!

ALRIGHT! I UNDERSTAND! I WILL PLAY WITH YOUR PUPPETS!

BAD?

MY LITTLE FOX .. WHY IS IT,

I'VE BEEN IN THE CIRCUS SINCE I WAS 9! GOT IT!?

ALRIGHT! I'M SHINOBU NAKAMACHI, AND I'LL BE 53 THIS YEAR!!

HEY, FOX! AND YOU, CLOWN WITH THE STUPID HEAD!

I DON'T KNOW IF YOU'RE AWARE OF IT, BUT WE'RE NOT LIVING IN A FAIRY TALE! IN THIS WORLD, YOU NEED MONEY TO SURVIVE!

WHO'S "ME" ?

AND ME, I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH TO SUPPORT HIRO, NORI, MASARU AND SHIRO-GANE!

CRRAC-CROC

HOW COME I'M LYING!?

LOOK!!

BE CAREFUL ARLEQUIN! I'M SURE IT'S NOTHING BUT A STORY! IT'S NOT TRUE! HE LIES!

OH MY! WHAT A SUR- PRISE!

GLOUPS!

REALLY AMAZING!!

I CAN EASILY DIGEST TWO OR THREE A DAY! AND I CAN ALSO DO LOTS OF OTHER THINGS!

HE'S A STONE EATER! ONE OF THE DESCENDANTS OF THE GREAT STONE EATERS WHO LIVED IN LONDON IN 1780!!

SHE'S WELL INFORMED!

HUH ...

YOU THINK?

FIRST, THIS GIRL!

YEAH! TELL ME WHO I'M AFRAID OF!

HOW AMAZING! BUT THEN... WHO OR WHAT IS HE AFRAID OF?

HAH! THAT'S RIDICULOUS! WHY WOULD I BE AFRAID OF THIS GIRL...

...AND THIS BRAT?

...MASARU?

THEN, THIS BOY!

HUMANS ARE ALWAYS AFRAID OF WHAT THEY DON'T KNOW

BECAUSE HE DOESN'T KNOW WHERE THEY COME FROM

IT'S TRUE, ARLEQUIN ...

WHY?

AND SHIROGANE, SHE'S MASARU'S WET-NURSE'S DAUGHTER.

MASARU'S FAMILY WAS VERY RICH AND HE WAS LIVING IN FRANCE BEFORE...

BUT THEY TOLD HIM WHERE THEY CAME FROM, DIDN'T THEY?

WHEN MASARU'S PARENTS DIED, HIS UNCLE ADOPTED HIM... BUT THIS MAN IS VERY SPITEFUL. SO MASARU AND SHIROGANE LEFT HIS HOUSE...

YES, THAT'S IT.. AND SINCE MASARU'S FAMILY WAS RUINED BECAUSE OF BAD ECONOMIC CIRCUM-STANCES, SHIROGANE TAKES CARE OF HIM. SHE WANTS TO HELP HIM BECAUSE OF EVERYTHING MASARU'S FAMILY DID FOR HER BEFORE . BUT I THINK THEY ALREADY TOLD MISTER NAKAMACHI ALL THAT, DIDN'T THEY?

MORE-OVER, HE RESPECTS THESE PEOPLE'S PRIVATE LIFE AND SECRETS .

OF COURSE, AS HE'S BEEN IN THE CIRCUS FOR A LONG TIME, HE'S WORKED WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE LED COMPLICATED LIVES .

BUT ... I ...

...THOSE STORIES

I THINK MISTER NAKAMACHI STILL HAS SOME DOUBTS ABOUT ..

HEY, ONE MOMENT! I DON'T EVEN THINK THAT!

HE'S NEVER SEEN AN ARTIST LIKE HER!

SHE SEEMS COLD AND DIFFICULT TO AP-PROACH.. SHE CER-TAINLY CAN'T BE TRUSTED!

SHIRO-GANE ...

..IS LIKE A DOLL!

BUT WHEN HE MET MASARU AND SHIROGANE, THEY REALLY HAD TOO MANY PROBLEMS! PROBLEMS THAT WERE BEYOND UNDERSTANDING!

AND MORE THAN THAT..

WELL, OK! IT'S TRUE! I MAY HAVE THOUGHT ABOUT THAT A LITTLE!!

IT'S TRUE THAT I'M SOME-WHAT STRANGE

DID YOU SEE THE WEIRD PUPPET SHE MANIPU-LATES!!

YOU'RE LIKE MY FAMILY!

SO I'VE DECIDED TO TRUST YOU COM-PLETELY!

BUT NOW, YOU'RE MEMBERS OF THE NAKAMACHI CIRCUS!!

AND ME, I'M AT HIS SERVICE, AND I'M ENTIRELY DEVOTED TO HIM!

...MASTER MASARU WILL NEVER BETRAY YOU!

IF THOSE WORDS ARE TRUE ...

...I KNOW THAT ONE DAY ...

DON'T WORRY, MISTER NAKAMACHI ...

HAPPINESS WILL KNOCK ON YOUR DOOR.

TUUUT

WHH HH

YES.

IT'S UNDER THAT CONDITION THAT HE'LL GIVE YOU FOOD ... IS THAT UNDERSTOOD?

SHINOBU, WHEN YOU'RE IN THIS LITTLE STREET CIRCUS, YOU'LL HAVE TO LISTEN CAREFULLY TO THE CHIEF AND DO EVERYTHING HE TELLS YOU TO...

...BE SURE THAT ONE DAY, HAPPINESS WILL COME TO YOU.

IF YOU'RE ABLE TO PERSEVERE ...

"BY PERSEVERING, HAPPINESS WILL COME" ...

AND YOU EVEN MADE ME REMEMBER MY PAST...

YOU ALWAYS HAVE THIS DISTANT, COLD LOOK BUT YOU DRAGGED ME INTO YOUR LITTLE GAME ...

SHIROGANE, YOU'RE A MYSTERIOUS GIRL...

...AND IT WAS ALWAYS VERY COLD.

EVERY NIGHT, WE CRIED OURSELVES TO SLEEP...

THERE WERE OTHER BRATS WITH ME... WE HAD TO EAT THE FOOD THAT THE SPECTATORS LEFT UNDER THEIR SEATS...

BUT TODAY, I HAVE AN EASY LIFE COMPARED TO BEFORE! WHEN I JOINED THIS STREET CIRCUS, I WAS TREATED LIKE AN ANIMAL... EVEN WORSE, LIKE GARBAGE!

IT'S EASY TO OVERLOOK ...

FLATCH!

YOU CAN'T DO THOSE ACROBATIC TRICKS?

IF YOU DON'T WANT THESE NEEDLES IN YOUR BUTT, YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO SUCCEED NEXT TIME!!

I CAN SAY THAT I NEVER KNEW THIS FAMOUS "HAPPINESS" MY MOTHER TALKED ABOUT.

...BUT MY CIRCUS WENT BANKRUPT ALMOST INSTANTLY.

A LONG TIME AFTER, I FINALLY SUCCEEDED IN REALIZING ONE OF MY DREAMS...

BUT ... DESPITE ...

I'VE ENDED UP CONVINCED THAT HAPPINESS WILL NEVER COME TO ME!

EVEN TODAY, I DON'T HAVE MONEY OR A BIG TROUPE ...

...AND I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE TO GO!

HNN!

AAAH ... NN ...

DID HE HAVE A NIGHTMARE?

MASTER!

TAN

AAHHH!!

WOW

...
SHOULDN'T KNOW THAT.

SUCH ANGUISH ON HIS FACE! A LITTLE BRAT...

AND ... THE PUP-PETS ...

THE ARM ...

I'M HERE!

EVERYTHING'S FINE MASTER!!

...TO MASARU AS WELL AS EVERYONE AROUND US.

IF THERE'S A GOD OF MERCY UP THERE IN THE SKY ...

...I PRAY FOR HIM TO GIVE HIS BLESSING ...

LIKE THE LEAVES THAT DANCE ON THE WIND ... YOUR BED SWINGS SLOWLY ...

MY LITTLE BOY ... MY DEAR BOY ...

...
AND HAPPINESS!

AND I PRAY THAT ONE DAY, WE'LL FIND PEACE...

SAH...

...
SHIRO-GANE'S HEART IS LIKE THAT OF A MOTHER
...

TO SAY THAT I WAS CHEERED UP BY A MEMBER OF MY CIR-CUS!

OK... YOU CONVINCED ME !

MISTER NAKA-MACHI IS A COURA-GEOUS MAN!

I THOUGHT HE WAS DISCOUR-AGED BUT I WAS WRONG!

HE DOESN'T SMELL ANY-MORE!

SNIFF!

SNIFF! SNIFF!

...AND I THINK THAT IT'S EVER SINCE THIS NIGHT THAT THE NAKAMACHI CIRCUS BEGAN TO CHANGE, LITTLE BY LITTLE.

LONG AFTER THIS FAMOUS NIGHT, I LEARNED WHAT MASARU SAW IN HIS DREAM...

YES... LOTS OF EVENTS AN-NOUNCED A GREAT CHANGE...

IN RETURN, I ASK YOU TO ACCEPT ME AS A MEMBER OF YOUR CIRCUS FOR AT LITTLE WHILE, AT LEAST.

THE BIG TRUCK BEHIND ME IS FOR YOU.

IT'S ME, TARANDA LISELOTTE ... I CAME BACK.

AS FOR US, WE ARE GOING GROCERY SHOPPING...

HELLO! IT'S ME, MASARU! THE NAKAMACHIS ARE VERY BUSY FITTING OUT THE TRUCK THAT TARANDA OFFERED THEM

YES!

HIRO! YOU TAKE CARE OF DECORATING THE INTERIOR!

OKAY!

NORI! YOU'LL INSTALL THE AIR CONDITIONING!

THIS WAS A SUMPTUOUS GIFT FOR US WHO DID NOT EVEN HAVE A PLACE TO LIVE!

INTERVAL:

"SHOPPING"

YOU'LL CARRY THEIR BAGS, ALL RIGHT? YOU ARE A MAN, SO IT'S UP TO YOU TO DO IT!

HEY, MASARU!

YES

POOR MASARU... HE WON'T BE ABLE TO CARRY ALL THE R BAGS! IT'S OUR DUTY TO HELP HIM!

HOP HOP

TO THINK THEY LIVE WITH US!!

IT'S LIKE A DREAM!

OH!

SHIROGANE! MISS LISELOTTE!

...

THEY ARE SO PRETTY!!

WELL SEE YOU LATER!

IDIOTS! I'M GONNA GIVE YOU A GOOD REASON TO STICK OUT YOUR TONGUE!! FINISH YOUR TASKS ALREADY!!

NAKATA
ドラッグ

BLA
BLA

SO. . YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS WANT TO KILL YOU BE-CAUSE OF ALL THAT MONEY YOU INHERITED FROM YOUR FATHER?
WHAT A STORY!

WHY IS THAT?
SAY, TARANDA... I'D LIKE YOU TO NOT TALK ABOUT THIS TO THE NAKAMA-CHIS RIGHT NOW...

.. NOT KNOWING WHO THE YOUNG MASTER IS!

BESIDES, IF ANYTHING HAPPENS, THEY WILL PROBABLY BE MUCH SAFER..

...I'M REALLY AFRAID TO TELL THE OTHERS THAT I'M SO RICH ...

THEY ARE VERY NICE, BUT...

ONCE FACED WITH A LOT OF MONEY, I'VE SEEN SO MANY PEOPLE'S BEHAVIOR CHANGE RADICALLY!

YOU ARE KIND, TARANDA.

IF THAT'S WHAT YOU WISH, MASARU, I WON'T TELL ANYBODY...

.. I UNDER-STAND...

BUT ...

HUH?!

THEREFORE, I ADVISE YOU TO REMAIN INCONSPIC-UOUS IN THE CROWD.

YOUNG MASTER, I HAVE ALREADY SAID THIS MANY TIMES...

YES ..

YOU COULD BE A TARGET OF CRIMINALS AT ANY TIME!

GOOOH!

I'M GONNA GO LOOK AT HER FROM THE FRONT !!

SHE MUST BE A MODEL!

ON TOP OF THAT, SHE'S SO SLENDER!

IS THAT HER REAL HAIR COLOR?

WHAT A BEAUTY!

WOW!! DID YOU SEE THAT HOTTIE?!

CAN I GET AN AUTO-GRAPH?!

YOU LOOK SMALLER THAN ON TV! BUT THAT MAKES YOU EVEN CUTER!

WHAT COURAGE!

YES! I SAW YOU ON THE NEWS! I HEARD THAT YOU HAD COME FROM THE UNITED STATES TO FACE THIS BEAST ALL BY YOURSELF!

SAY, MISS! AREN'T YOU THE TAMER WHO BEAT THAT HUGE MAN-EATING TIGER?

BRLOOM

RLOOMM

BOING!

VOMF

SBLING

BLANG

BLONG

VÊTEMENTS DE MARQUE LAFRIM

SALE 707

SALE 3,000

I AM BUT A SIMPLE PUPPET-EER...

IT'S BECAUSE YOU'RE VERY PRETTY, SHIRO-GANE!

I DID NOT THINK THAT A SIMPLE TRACKSUIT COULD DRAW SO MUCH AT-TENTION!

SOLDES

GIVE US NORMAL CLOTHES!

SHIROGANE, YOU'RE THE MOST CONSPIC-UOUS ONE AMONG US!

THANK YOU FOR WAITING ...

WOW!

THE YOUNG MASTER IS NOT USED TO ANSWERING THAT KIND OF QUESTION.

TA-RANDA ...

MASARU!

MASARU, DON'T I LOOK TOO WEIRD IN THESE CLOTHES?

GOOHH...

EVEN THOUGH THEY DON'T GET ALONG!

DOGS AND CATS FROM THE NEIGH-BORHOOD ALL COME TO YOU...

AND YOU, YOU HAD A FIGHT WITH ONE OF YOUR FRIENDS.

YES... YOU'RE ALL HUNGRY, AREN'T YOU?

STOP!

PFFH

HAF!

YOU DON'T GIVE THEM A REWARD, BUT THEY LISTEN TO YOU ALL THE SAME! THIS PROVES THAT YOU REALLY ARE A TAMER!

WOW!

THE OTHER ANIMALS SMELL IT AND THEY'RE AFRAID OF THAT.

SINCE I'VE LIVED WITH *DRUM* FOR A LONG TIME, HIS SCENT IS STILL VERY STRONG AROUND ME...

BUT, AT THE MOMENT, THE DOGS AND CATS AREN'T VERY COMFORTABLE WITH ME...

OH YEAH?

RAISING PETS BY GIVING THEM REWARDS IS NOT A GOOD METHOD. THAT'S WHAT I WAS TAUGHT

...

ALL THEY'LL WANT AFTERWARDS WILL BE TO OBTAIN FOOD

...

IT WILL BE THEIR ONLY MOTIVATION.

HEHE... HE LOVES SLEEPING, SO...

HE'S NOT TOO SAD?

I CAN'T TRAVEL FREELY WITH HIM, SO PROFESSOR MARUKI ASKED AN ACQUAINTANCE OF HIS WHO WORKS IN A BIG ZOO TO TAKE CARE OF HIM... *DRUM* IS IN THAT ZOO AT THE MOMENT.

BY THE WAY, WHERE DID YOU LEAVE *DRUM*?

THERE IS ANOTHER REASON ...

OH, THAT'S RIGHT SO YOU CAME HERE TO AVOID THEM.

WHAT BOTHERS ME MOST IS ALL THESE TV PEOPLE. THEY WON'T LEAVE ME ALONE..

..I ASKED TO JOIN THE NAKAMACHI CIRCUS.

I REALLY WANTED TO BE CLOSE TO YOU, MASARU! THAT'S WHY ...

CONVENIENCE STORE

HEY! THERE HE GOES AGAIN...

FOR THE GROCERIES, WE SHOULD GO TO...

HE'S PETRIFIED, LIKE A STONE!!

MASARU!! WHAT'S WRONG?!

TA DAY

YES, QUITE TRUE!

SINCE THEY EXERT THEMSELVES A LOT, CIRCUS PEOPLE EAT A LOT!

NOW THIS IS WHAT I CALL GROCERY SHOPPING !!

18,562 YEN*, PLEASE.

IN MY ACCOUNT IN THE US, I HAVE SOME SAVINGS...

* ABOUT 150 USD

ANYWAY, MISTER NAKAMACHI WOULD NEVER ACCEPT ANYONE'S CHARITY.

BUT, AS LONG AS THE YOUNG MASTER DOES NOT WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT, WE MUST NOT TELL THEM ABOUT HIS FORTUNE... WE SHOULD BE CAREFUL TO NEVER TALK ABOUT THIS IN FRONT OF THEM.

HM ...

YES.

UH, SHIROGANE... MISTER NAKAMACHI TOLD ME HE WASN'T VERY RICH...

ANYWAY, TARANDA AND I WILL HAVE TO MANAGE DEPENDING ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES...

...GOLD CARD?

CAN I PAY WITH THIS MAMEX GOLD CARD?

CA

A CIRCUS LIKE THAT PAYS ITS ARTISTS VERY WELL.

YOU WERE A FIRST-RATE ARTIST IN A FAMOUS AMERICAN CIRCUS...

YOU KNOW, I'M JUST VERY THRIFTY, THAT'S ALL...

TARANDA, I THINK YOU MUST BE QUITE RICH, OR ELSE YOU WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO OFFER THAT BIG TRUCK TO THE NAKAMACHIS.

TON...

TWO GREAT CIRCUS ARTISTS TALKING ABOUT IMPORTANT THINGS!

THEY SEEM TO GET ALONG VERY WELL...

THAT'S FANTASTIC! THOSE ARE VERY GOOD CIRCUSES!

YES.

AND YOU, SHIROGANE, I HEARD YOU WORKED IN PLACES LIKE THE CIRCUS OF CUNY IN SWITZERLAND, AND THE SARAZANI CIRCUS FROM GERMANY! IS THAT TRUE?

...

OH?! YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT "NATTO"?

THEY'RE FERMENTED BEAN-SPROUTS... ALMOST ROTTEN.

POP

• NATTO: VERY FERMENTED BEANSPROUTS. NATTO IS EATEN AS A SIDE DISH (MOST OFTEN WITH RICE). KNOWN TO BE GOOD FOR DIGESTION AND FULL OF VITAMINS (AND INFAMOUS FOR ITS STRONG, BAD SMELL), BUT NOT ALL JAPANESE PEOPLE LIKE THIS.

MY FATHER WAS JAPANESE. HE'S THE ONE WHO MADE ME TASTE IT ...

WE USED TO EAT IT FOR BREAK-FAST.

I BOUGHT IT BECAUSE I LOVE IT!

THERE YOU HAVE IT! IN FACT, THEY'RE TWO GREAT ARTISTS TALKING ABOUT VERY TRIVIAL THINGS...

IF YOU HEAT IT UP WELL, IT DOESN'T SMELL AS BAD!

BUT... ROTTEN FOOD...

NN...

... EVERY-THING YOU LIKED.

YOUNG MASTER... I HAVE TRIED TO APPRE-CIATE...

VR-R-R-OOM!!

HE TOOK THIS OLD LADY'S HANDBAG!!

SILVER BANK

CENTRAL BANK

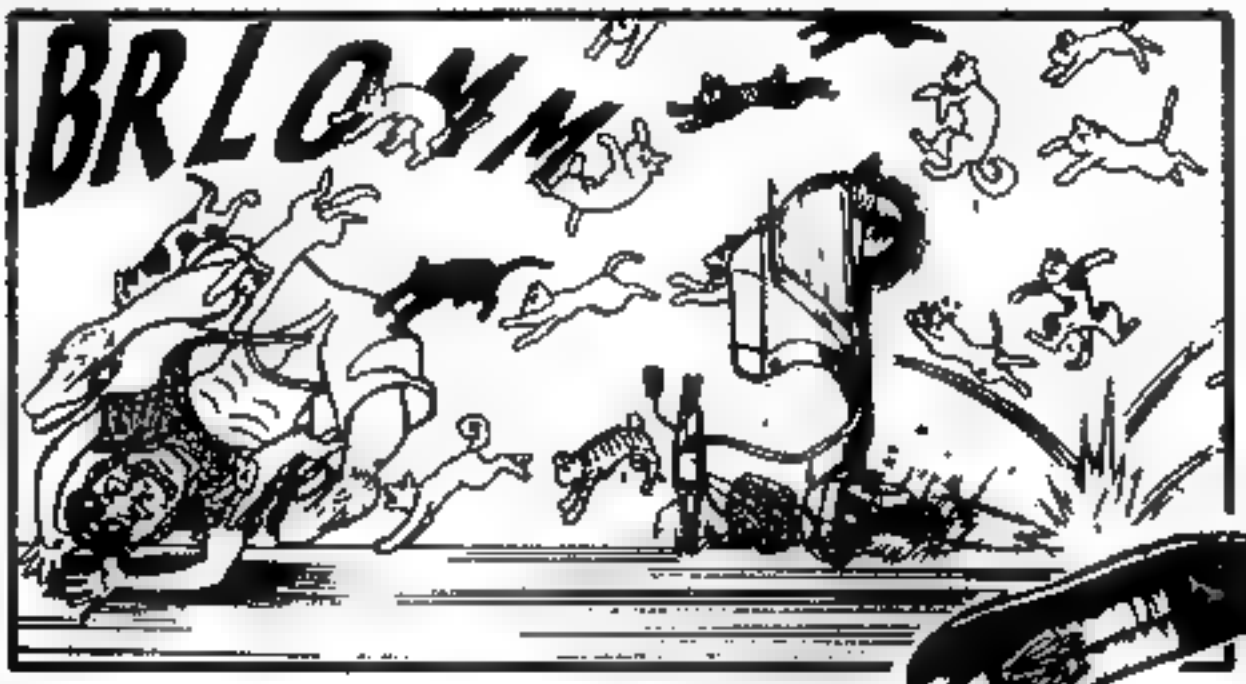
LOANS AT THE LOWEST RATES

IT'S A THIEF! STOP HIM!!

VR-VR-VR-

VRRA
EEHH! LET GO, YOU FILTHY BEASTS!
...
WHAT'S WRONG WITH YA!?

DAN
SHIT!


BRLOYM

VMMP

DAN DAN DAN

WAAA! WHO THE HECK ARE YA?!

BAM

SAH

GET OUTTA MY WAY, BRAT! GET LOST!

SPA

AH

IT'S REALLY TOO BAD...

BRAVO!!

SILVER BANK
CENTRAL BANK

BUT THERE ARE ONLY A FEW PEOPLE WHO GET TO APPRECIATE THE EXTENT OF THEIR ART ...

SHIROGANE AND TARANDA ARE FIRST-RATE ARTISTS WHO HAVE WORKED IN WORLD-FAMOUS CIRCUSES.

HEEEY!

OF COURSE, I'M NOT THINKING ONLY ABOUT THEM...

I HOPE THAT MANY MORE PEOPLE WILL GET TO WATCH THEM IN THE FUTURE.

YOU TOOK SO MUCH TIME! WE'RE STARVING!

FROM NOW ON, THIS IS OUR NEW HOME!

WE FINISHED FITTING OUT THE TRUCK!

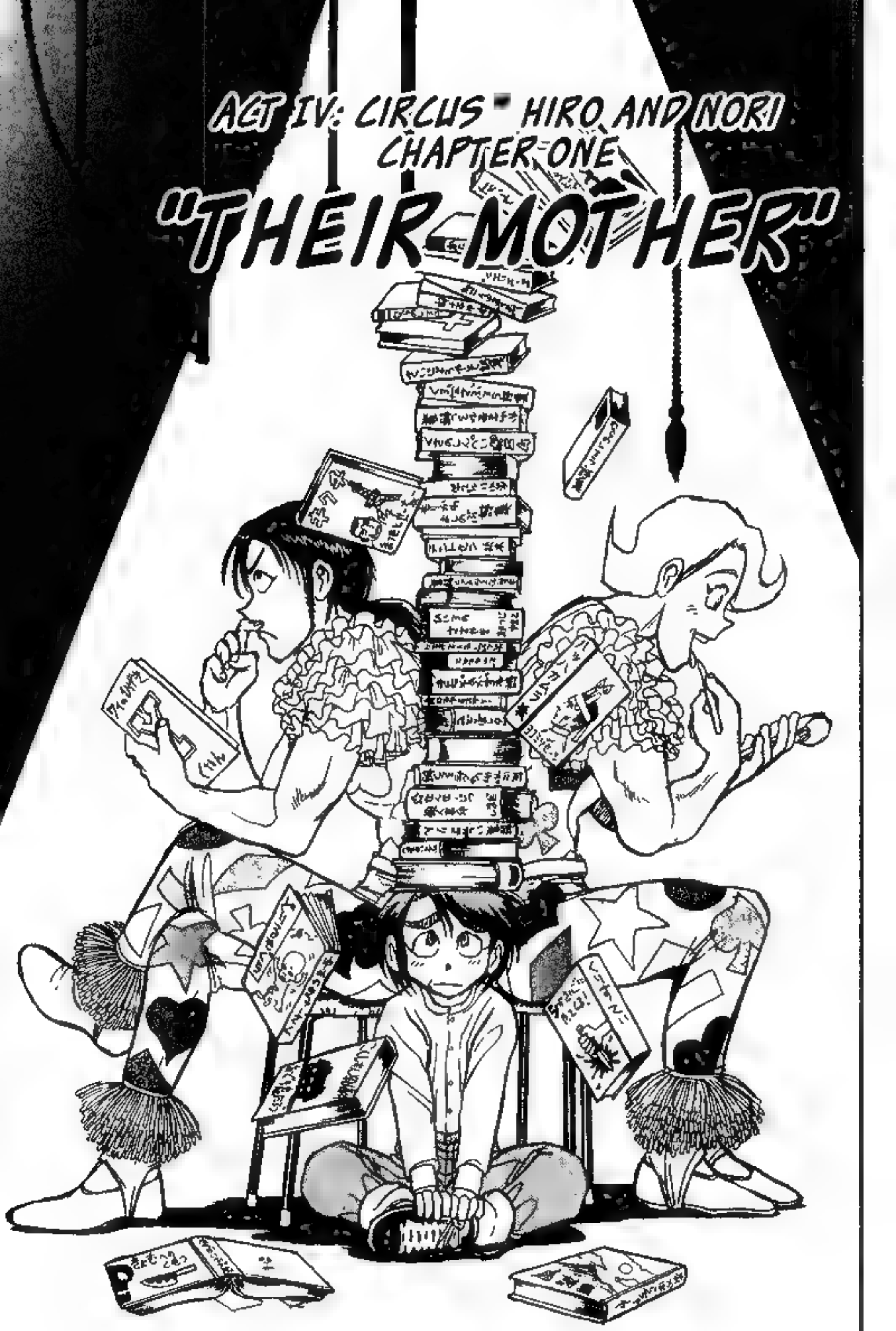
LOOK OVER HERE!

YES! I HOPE THAT MANY PEOPLE DISCOVER THE NAKAMACHI CIRCUS...

...
I STILL HAVE A HARD TIME IMAGINING SUCH A THING HAPPENING
...

YET...

ACT IV: CIRCUS - HIRO AND NORI
CHAPTER ONE
"THEIR MOTHER"



WE ARE CURRENTLY MAKING OUR WAY WEST.

RR

HELLO, EVERY-ONE!

AS FOR ME...

TARANDA, WHO OFFERED US A BIG TRUCK, JUST FELL ASLEEP.

SO WE ARE TRAVELING TO FIND A PLACE WHERE THEY'LL LET US DO IT.

I LEARNED THAT THE LAW HERE DOESN'T ALLOW CIRCUS SHOWS ON THE STREETS ...

... I'M REALLY UNCOM-FORTABLE!

WELL ...

VRR R OO

MM

RRRRM

IT'S BROKEN ...

MM

SAY, CAN I TURN ON THE RADIO?

APPARENTLY, NORI AND HIRO DON'T LIKE ME THAT MUCH...

VRRMM

IT TAKES VERY LITTLE FOR THEM TO CHANGE THEIR MIND.

HA HA HA! THEY'RE STUPID, BUT THEY'RE NOT THAT BAD!

WHAT WILL?

I HOPE IT WILL BE ALL RIGHT ...

I THINK YOUR TWO ADOPTED SONS DON'T LIKE THE YOUNG MASTER VERY MUCH...

I'M DRIVING THE SMALL TRUCK?!

COME WITH ME, HIRO!

YOU TOO, MASARU!

...IS HIRO NAKAMACHI. HE'S 20 YEARS OLD AND IS VERY GIFTED IN ALL ROPE-WALKING EXERCISES, AS WELL AS THE TRAM-POLINE.

AND THE OTHER ONE, WITH THE SLIGHTLY WAVY HAIR ...

...NORIYUKI NAKAMACHI. HE'S 21 YEARS OLD. I TAUGHT HIM TO BALANCE HIMSELF ON SEVEN STACKED CHAIRS.

THE BLACK-HAIRED BOY IS ...

NORI WAS ABANDONED IN A PUBLIC PARK ON A COLD WINTER DAY.

I ADOPTED THEM WHEN THEY WERE 9 AND 10 YEARS OLD. THEY HAD BOTH BEEN ABANDONED BY THEIR PARENTS ...

...IT WAS ON THE SCENIC TOP OF A SKY-SCRAPER.

AS FOR HIRO...

YOU ARE MARRIED, MR. NAKA-MACHI?

MY WIFE WAS THE ONE WHO FOUND THEM...

...AND HER NAME WAS FUSAE.

SHE WAS AN EQUILI-BRIST...

SHE ALWAYS SAID THAT SHE COULDN'T LEAVE A CRYING CHILD ALONE...

LISTEN, BOY!

VRROMM

POOR LITTLE DARLING! BUT YOU MANAGED TO KEEP SHIROGANE WITH YOU, AS A NANNY!

SO... YOU LEFT YOUR HOUSE BECAUSE YOUR DAD WAS MEAN?! IS THAT IT?!

REALLY ?

YEAH! WE WERE ABANDONED, TOO!

RROM

DON'T THINK WE'LL TAKE PITY ON YOU JUST BECAUSE YOU DON'T HAVE ANY PARENTS!

YOU'VE DEFINITELY PUT HER IN A VERY UNCOM-FORTABLE SITUATION !!!

YOU DIRTY LITTLE WORM!!! DON'T EVEN THINK OF ABUSING SHIROGANE'S KINDNESS!!!

I'VE HEARD THAT SOME PEOPLE GET OVEREXCITED JUST BY TALKING... NOW I BELIEVE IT...

...BUT I HAVEN'T TOLD THE NAKAMACHIS THE WHOLE TRUTH ABOUT US YET!

THAT'S PARTIALLY TRUE ...

THAT'S NO REASON TO MONOPOLIZE SHIROGANE! WHY SHOULD SHE SACRIFICE HERSELF TO TAKE CARE OF YOU?! JUST BECAUSE HER MOTHER WAS YOUR NANNY?!

WE DON'T CARE IF YOUR ONCE-VERY-RICH FAMILY WAS RUINED AND IS NOW DIRT POOR!!!

YOU'RE JUST A KID!

DON'T PRETEND TO UNDER-STAND EVERY-THING!!

ZONG

VOLOLONG

ALWAYS IN LONG SLEEVES AND PANTS, EVEN IN THE SUMMER!

...AND YOUR SLENDER BODY!

WITH YOUR LITTLE, MIDDLE-CLASS FACE!

EVERYTHING ABOUT HIM MAKES ME MAD!

... WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN TO ME?!

GRRR!!! I LOATHE EVERY SINGLE MOLECULE IN THIS BRAT!!!

ZOOHH

GOOHH

GRRR

YOU DON'T WANT TO TELL ME?

I HAVE TO CHANGE THE SUBJECT!

SAY... WHAT DO YOU LIKE SO MUCH ABOUT SHIROGANE? I'D LIKE TO KNOW.

...AND MOST OF ALL, I DON'T THINK I COULD STOP MYSELF FROM SATISFYING THE MANLY AND VIRIL NEED TO PASSIONATELY KISS HER ON THOSE OH SO DELICIOUSLY VOLUPTUOUS LIPS! NO, NO... I'M SURE I COULD NEVER HOLD BACK!!

AND WE HAVEN'T EVEN TALKED ABOUT HER VOICE! SO SILKY AND SEXY. I DON'T EVEN DARE IMAGINE THAT SHE COULD ONE DAY WHISPER MY NAME IN MY EAR WITH THAT VOICE! I THINK I WOULD COMPLETELY LOSE IT!

THERE'S ALSO HER EYES THAT SPARKLE LIKE LITTLE STARS! IF SHE STARED AT ME FOR MORE THAN TEN SECONDS WITH THOSE EYES, I THINK I'D BE SO MOVED MY SPINE WOULD MELT!!

IF I HAD TO COMPARE HER TO AN ACTRESS, I'D SAY SHE'S ANGELINA JOLIE'S TWIN SISTER!

...

AND HER SILVERY HAIR IS SO BEAUTIFUL!! AN INCOMPARABLE BEAUTY! AND...

YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND? ARE YOU BLIND OR WHAT!? SHE'S OUTRAGEOUSLY PRETTY! AND HER BODY IS SO FIRM, YET SO FLEXIBLE AT THE SAME TIME!

...

HOW TO CALL SUCH A WOMAN?! SHE'S A REAL "VENUS"!

WHO DOES SHIROGANE REMIND YOU OF?

REALLY? YOU THINK SO TOO?

BUT, ON THE OTHER HAND... SHE REMINDS ME SO MUCH OF HER...

...

...YES...

WHH H H

...MOMMY?

BLA

BLA

BLA

MOMMY !

WHERE ARE YOU?!

MOMMY, COME BACK !!!

MOMMY !

BOING

EH?

ARE YOU LOST?

BRAVE LITTLE BOYS ...

...SHOULDN'T CRY!

WE'LL LOOK FOR HER TOGETHER!

COME ON! I'LL HELP YOU FIND YOUR MOM!

...SO WE DECIDED TO ADOPT HIRO AND NORI AND RAISE THEM IN OUR CIRCUS.

WE NEVER DID FIND THEIR PARENTS ...

YOU'RE NOT MY MOTHER! YOU'LL NEVER BE MY MOTHER! SO I CAN DO WHATEVER I WANT!!

MY CIRCUS WAS DOING WELL AT THAT TIME, SO THERE WAS NO PROBLEM ON THE FRONT OF RAISING THEM, BUT...

AS YOU KNOW, A CIRCUS IS LIKE A SMALL COMMUNITY.

VERY OFTEN, MANY FAMILIES TRAVEL TOGETHER, SO WE ALWAYS HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF THE KIDS COLLECTIVELY.

WHAT IS THIS?! I DON'T WANT IT!!

BAH

...IT TOOK THEM BOTH A LOT OF TIME TO ACCEPT FUSAE.

FU

BUT, NORI WAS VERY DIFFICULT, TOO.

ESPECIALLY HIRO.

HIRO, WAIT!

SHE NEVER GAVE UP...

BAH, IT'S NORMAL! I NEVER STUDIED, SO I CAN'T UNDERSTAND THEIR FEELINGS! I'M TOO RUSTIC!

THE OTHERS COMPLAINED OR MADE FUN OF HER.

I'LL MAKE THEM THE BEST PICNIC LUNCH IN THE WORLD!

HIRO AND NORI HAVE A FIELD TRIP AT SCHOOL TOMORROW.

YOU NEVER WANTED TO EAT THE ONIGIRI* SHE LOVINGLY MADE FOR YOU!

IN FACT, HIRO, YOU DIDN'T ACCEPT MOM AT ALL AT THE BEGINNING.

*RICE BALL FILLED WITH VARIOUS SALTY OR PICKLED THINGS, POPULAR IN JAPAN AS A SNACK

...
I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH IT...

YEAH, BUT IT'S BECAUSE ...

YOU NEVER WANTED TO PUT ON THE SHIRT SHE HAD MADE ESPECIALLY FOR YOU! YOU EVEN SOLD IT TO SOMEONE!

YOU'RE ONE TO TALK, NORI!

BUT... YOU ENDED UP ACCEPTING YOUR MOTHER, RIGHT?

ME, TOO... AND I THOUGHT THAT OUR ADOPTIVE MOTHER WAS AN EVIL PERSON WHO LIED TO US.

IN REALITY, WHEN I WAS YOUNG, I UNCONSCIOUSLY THOUGHT THAT THE CIRCUS PEOPLE HAD KIDNAPPED ME...

DOOO

SBLAM

MY WHOLE BODY WAS SHAKING

I WAS THE ONE IN CHARGE OF CLEANING MY PARENTS' ROOM EVERY DAY...

GHHH

AND I DROPPED IT!! IT BROKE INTO A THOUSAND PIECES!!

I KNEW THE PRICE OF THAT VASE...

SO I THOUGHT THAT THE ONLY SOLUTION WAS TO RUN AWAY...

I KNEW VERY WELL THAT I COULD NEVER PAY IT BACK, EVEN IF I WORKED MY WHOLE LIFE...

MY REAL FAMILY, THE ONE WHO ABANDONED ME, WAS ALSO VERY POOR. SO I TRULY KNEW WHAT THIS VASE REPRESENTED...

GOY

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?!

AND THEN ...

EVEN THOUGH I WAS STARTING TO GET USED TO THE CIRCUS...

BAAM

IDIOT !!

YOU ARE UNIQUE IN THIS WORLD! SO... I DON'T WANT TO LOSE YOU!

BUT YOU, YOU'RE NOT A VASE!

A VASE IS JUST A MANMADE OBJECT! IF IT BREAKS, YOU CAN ALWAYS GO BUY ANOTHER ONE!

AT THAT MOMENT, I UNDERSTOOD THAT SHE WAS MY REAL MOTHER...

WWW

SNIF SNIF

MAYBE TODAY'S BOYS DON'T KNOW ABOUT IT ANYMORE.

WHEN WE WERE YOUNG, IT WAS A VERY POPULAR GAME WITH BOYS ... THERE WERE MANY WAYS YOU COULD PLAY IT.

MARBLES? ... GLASS MARBLES?

VRROM

...AN AFFAIR WITH MARBLES.

AS FOR NORIYUKI, IT WAS AFTER...

REALLY? THIS KIND OF GAME EXISTED A LONG TIME AGO?

WHEN IT TOUCHED SOMEONE ELSE'S MARBLE, THAT MARBLE BECAME OURS.

WE PUT ALL THE MARBLES ON THE GROUND, AND WE EACH FLICKED ONE OF OUR OWN MARBLES DURING OUR TURNS...

HA HA, I REMEMBER THAT YOU WEREN'T VERY GOOD AT MARBLES.

DON'T EXAGGER-ATE!

WHADDAYA MEAN, "A LONG TIME AGO"?!

WELL... I MEANT TO SAY ...

ZOING

IF YOU WERE GOOD AT SOME FASHIONABLE GAMES, YOU COULD MAKE NEW FRIENDS VERY QUICKLY.

BECAUSE OF OUR PARENTS' JOB, WE HAD TO CHANGE SCHOOLS EVERY THREE MONTHS.

WHEN WE WERE KIDS, THERE WAS A "TRAVELING SCHOOL" SYSTEM.

I ENDED UP LOSING ALL MY MARBLES...

AND THE OTHERS ALL MADE FUN OF ME.

IN ONE OF THE SCHOOLS WE ATTENDED, THE BOYS WERE PARTICULARLY OBSESSED WITH IT.

BUT I WAS HORRIBLE AT PLAYING MARBLES...

YOU'RE NOT SALUTING THE PUBLIC?

I'LL TAKE CARE OF YOU!

GOH

WHAT?! YOU LOST ALL YOUR MARBLES ?!

MOM WAS OUTRAGED!

AND FROM THAT DAY ON...

SHE TRAINED ME SERIOUSLY.

RIGHT AWAY, WITHOUT EVEN CHANGING ...

...SHE SHOWED ME SOME TRICKS.

GHH

WHEN YOU MASTER THIS SPECIAL TECHNIQUE, YOU'LL HAVE NO RIVAL!

RELAX YOURSELF!

IF YOU HIT IT STRONGLY ON THIS SIDE...

TAC

LOOK!

MOM WAS ALWAYS FULL OF ENERGY...

YES...

SHE BECAME ...

... MY ONLY REAL MOTHER.

AT THAT MOMENT ...

SHE EXPLODED WITH JOY, AS IF IT WAS HER WHO HAD WON...

ONE DAY, I CAME BACK FROM SCHOOL WITH A HUGE BAG OF MARBLES.

SOMETHING TERRIBLE...

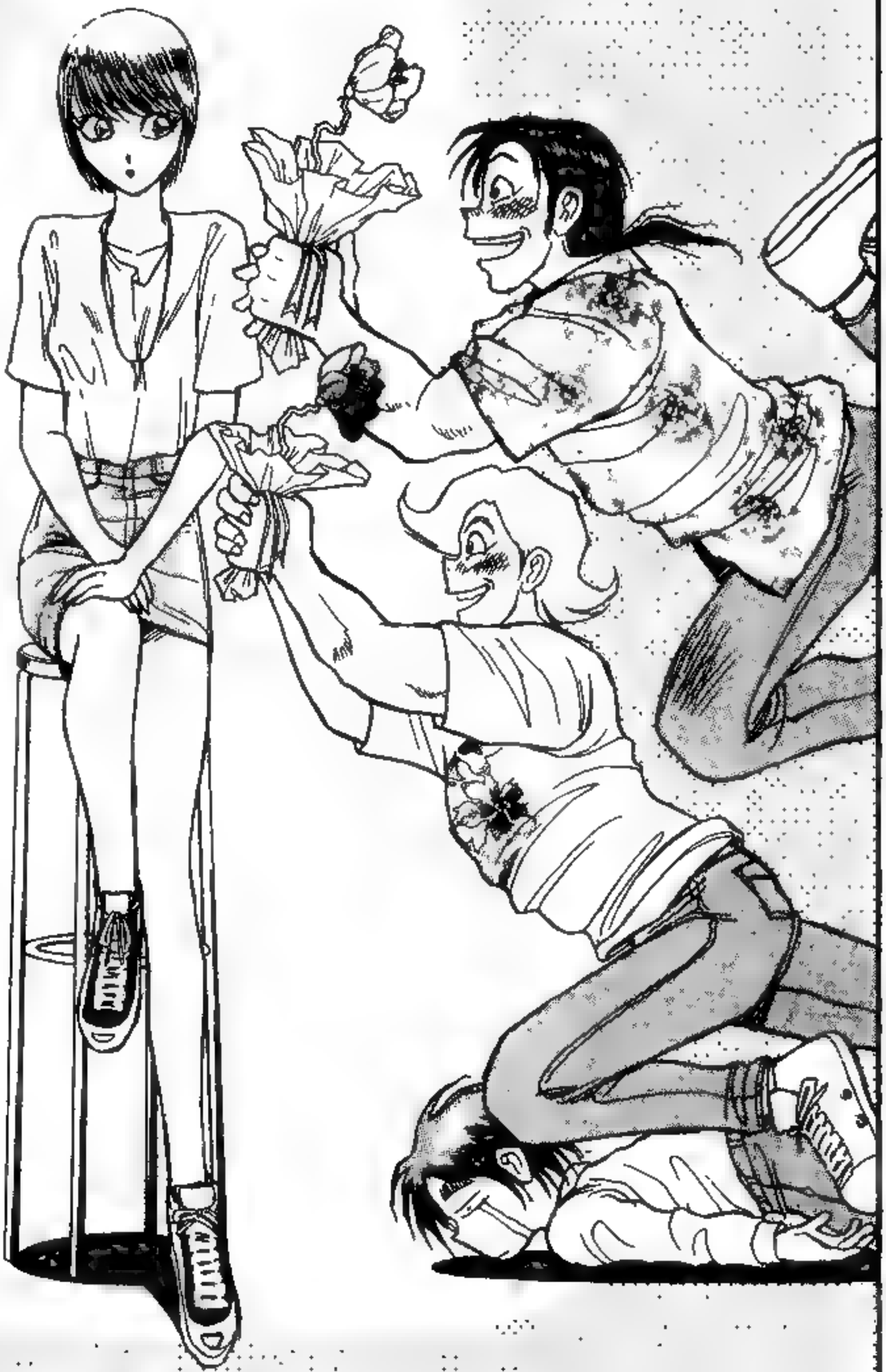
... HAPPENED.

BUT... THEN...

HM?

ACT IV: CIRCUS * HIRO AND NORI
CHAPTER TWO

"THEY ARE GETTING ANGRY"



GOOH

...TO YOUR MOTHER?

YOU DON'T WANNA TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED ...

...

YOU KNOW, YOU DON'T HAVE TO CALL ME "MOM."

THEY MUST HAVE LIVED THROUGH VERY DIFFICULT TIMES.

IF YOUR MOTHERS LEFT YOU, SURELY THERE WAS A GOOD REASON...

R-ROMM

MM

YES... SHE USED TO POST FLYERS IN THE STREETS OR GO TO THE POLICE...

DID YOU KNOW THAT SHE WAS LOOKING FOR OUR MOTHERS EVERY-WHERE WE WENT?

BY THE WAY, HIRO...

I'M SURE YOUR REAL MOTHERS WILL ONE DAY COME LOOKING FOR YOU!

BUT WHEN WE DID...

SHE NEVER WANTED US TO CALL HER "MOM"...

VROOM

...SHE LOOKED SO HAPPY!

TO NORI AND HIRO...

...FUSAE WAS MORE THAN A REAL MOTHER!

R-ROOM

THAT'S TRUE...

THEY DEFINITELY WOULD LEAVE IF SOMEONE WERE TO COME FOR THEM.

THESE CHILDREN DIDN'T COME HERE BECAUSE THEY LIKED THE CIRCUS.

NO...

IF IT MAKES YOU SO HAPPY WHEN THEY CALL YOU MOM, WHY DON'T YOU LET THEM?

WE'VE ADOPTED HIRO AND NORI NOW...

...I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO DEAL WITH IT!

THEY SAID, "GOOD-BYE, MOM"...

ON THAT DAY...

SO, IF...

YOU WOULD QUICKLY SEE THE AFFECTION SHE GAVE OTHERS.

BUT WHEN YOU GOT CLOSER TO HER ...

YOU COULD SEE DETERMINATION ON HER FACE... WHAT'S MORE, SHE HAD SUCH A CHARACTER! MANY PEOPLE THOUGHT IT HAD TO BE DIFFICULT LIVING WITH HER...

HER NICKNAME WAS "THE QUEEN OF THE HIGHWIRE"... SHE WAS SO BEAUTIFUL!

...LIKE YOU, SHIROGANE ...

A LITTLE BIT...

YOU STILL HAVEN'T MANAGED TO TAME THIS KID?

DO YOU THINK THAT IF I WERE MARRIED, THE YOUNG MASTER WOULD TALK TO ME DIFFERENTLY?

...NO!

I'M JUST A PUPPET ...

I UNDER-STAND VERY WELL THAT WE DO NOT HAVE A VERY...

...NORMAL RELATION-SHIP.

AS IF HE WERE EMBAR-RASSED TO TALK TO ME.

WHEN HE TALKS TO ME... EVERY TIME...

...HE SEEMS TO BE SORRY...

...

I THINK YOUR RELATIONSHIP WON'T BE ABLE TO CHANGE AS LONG AS YOU REMAIN A SIMPLE GOVERNESS, WHO IS THERE ONLY TO SERVE HIM...

SO, IF I WERE CLOSER TO HIM... MAYBE...

FUSAE SCOLDED THE BOYS VERY OFTEN...

...WHEN THEY DID DANGEROUS THINGS, OR WHEN THEY CAUSED ACCI-DENTS, EVEN INVOLUN-TARILY.

BRMMM

AH?

VRROMM

...
WOULD YOU BE ABLE TO REPRIMAND MASARU?

BUT YOU...

SHE SCOLDED THEM.

CIRQUE NAKAMACHI

EVEN ON THE DAY SHE DIED, UNTIL THE VERY LAST MOMENT...

FUSAE ...

WHAT ARE YOU BABBLING ABOUT?! TO A REAL CIRCUS ARTIST, A LITTLE FEVER IS NOTHING ONCE SHE'S IN THE RING!

YOU HAVE TO REST SOME MORE!

MOM, YOUR FEVER IS TOO HIGH!

IT HAPPENED IN NAGOYA ...

OUAAHH!

WE WERE BACKSTAGE, WATCHING HER AS USUAL.

IT WAS SEVEN YEARS AGO...

YES, EXACTLY ...

SHE LOOKED LIKE ONE OF THE FAIRIES PEOPLE DESCRIBE IN CHILDREN'S TALES...

SHE WAS SO BEAUTIFUL...

SHE HAD FINISHED HER NUMBER AND WAS GETTING READY TO COME DOWN...

WE RAN TO HER AS FAST AS WE COULD.

PEOPLE WERE SHOUTING AROUND THE RING ...

QUICKLY... BRING IN... THE NEXT ACT...

GET ME OUT OF THE RING QUICKLY... OR ELSE... THE AUDIENCE... WILL WORRY TOO MUCH...

NO!!!

HIRO, NORI! COME HERE!

GENTLY! BE CAREFUL WHEN YOU LIFT HER!

...EH!

ME, TOO! I WANNA STAY WITH HER!

NO! I WANNA STAY WITH MOM!

...TILL THE END!

THE SHOW MUST GO ON ...

IN A CIRCUS ...

BUT...

YOU HAVE TO DO THE LAST ACT... ON THE UNICYCLE.

CHIL-DREN ...

MOMMY?

MOMMY!!

...I'LL BECOME YOUR REAL MOMMY.

THEN...

IF I COME BACK ...

UNFOR-TUNATELY ...

I...

BOW

BUT...

HEY, MASARU! YOU DON'T HAVE TO CRY LIKE THAT!

SNIF

...SHE NEVER CAME BACK... NEVER...

NOT AT ALL! HE'S CRYING BECAUSE YOU TOLD HIM HE WAS WEIRD!

HIRO, YOU PINCHED HIS CHEEK TOO HARD EARLIER!

BUH HOU

ANYWAY, THAT ALREADY HAPPENED SEVEN YEARS AGO.

HA HA HA! DON'T BE SO FORMAL! YOU DIDN'T EVEN KNOW HER.

MY SINCERE CONDO-LENCES, MR. NAKA-MACHI...

WHEN YOU DIE...

...EVERY-THING IS OVER!

NO MATTER WHAT PEOPLE DO...

I'M SURE THAT YOU DON'T NEED THAT AT ALL!

YOU THINK YOU HAVE TO BECOME LIKE FUSAE?

YOU'LL NEVER UNDERSTAND THE VALUE OF THE LIFE OF ANY HUMAN BEING!"

"IF YOU DON'T VALUE YOUR OWN LIFE...

MM

I DON'T SEE THEM LIKE THAT VERY OFTEN! USUALLY, AS SOON AS THERE IS A GIRL AROUND, THEY IMMEDIATELY GO HIT ON HER!
...
BUT THEY'VE NEVER BEEN IN LOVE WITH A CIRCUS ARTIST BEFORE.

AH?

HA HA HA! YOU KNOW THAT HIRO AND NORI ARE CRAZY ABOUT YOU, DON'T YOU?

BUT...

STILL... I'M NOT...

BUT STOP FOCUSING ON THIS AND THAT!

AND I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU THINK OF YOURSELF
...

LISTEN, I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOUR LIFE...

BUT... I'M NOT...

SOME-THING... INSIDE ME?!?

...SOMETHING YOU DON'T REALIZE YET. BUT IT REMINDS THEM A LOT OF FUSAE.

HIRO AND NORI PROBABLY ARE IN LOVE WITH SOME-THING INSIDE YOU...

...I COULDN'T HELP LISTENING IN.

FORGIVE ME, BUT...

TELL ME HOW I COULD HELP YOU IN RETURN!!

YOU ALL WENT THROUGH VERY DIFFICULT MOMENTS, BUT I BEHAVED LIKE I WAS THE MOST UNHAPPY GIRL IN THE WORLD...

MOREOVER, YOU'RE THE ONES WHO SAVED ME ...

I'M RATHER ASHAMED ...

I KNOW THAT MANY ARTISTS HAVE LOST THEIR LIVES IN A CIRCUS RING.

EH? WHY ARE WE STOPPING HERE?

CENTRAL BANK

CENTRAL BANK

IIKK

SHE WOULD LIKE TO ...

REALLY? WE WERE TALKING ABOUT HER, TOO!

TARANDA HEARD ME RECOUNT YOUR MOTHER'S STORY...

I LET HER OFFER US AN ELECTRIC GENERATOR.

AT THE BEGINNING, I REFUSED, BUT SHE INSISTED SO MUCH! SO...

PLEAAASE! LET ME OFFER YOU SOMETHIIING!

BZOING

HEY, YOU! STOP CRYING!

THANK YOU, TARANDA! THANK YOU!

SHE'S GOING TO WITHDRAW SOME MONEY FROM THIS BANK...

WOOHOO! A GENERATOR! HOORAY FOR TECHNOLOGY!

SILVER BANK
CENTRAL BANK

SALON

IT'S TRUE THAT IT IS QUITE HOT!

LET'S GO COOL OFF INSIDE. THEY'VE GOT TO HAVE AC ...

N...NOBODY MOVE!!!

OR ELSE... I... I'LL BLOW EVERYTHING UP!

EVEN THEN, YOU KNOW VERY WELL... I CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT YOU BY MY SIDE! PLUS, SINCE YOU'VE LEFT ME, I'VE COMPLETELY STOPPED DRINKING... YOU UNDERSTAND, FUSAE?!

...AND NEITHER WILL THE CHILDREN!

I'VE TOLD YOU ALREADY, I WON'T COME BACK TO LIVE WITH YOU!

I'M BEGGING YOU! STOP!

SHUT UP!

BOH TON

HEY, YOU! GET DOWN!

... FUSAE ?!?

LEAVE THE KIDS AND COME BACK TO ME!

I DON'T CARE ABOUT THE KIDS! THEY DON'T LOVE ME! I NEVER WANNA SEE THEM AGAIN!

ANYWAY ...

BUT YOU, FUSAE... YOU HAVE TO COME BACK!

MY EX-HUSBAND USED TO WORK IN A CHEMICAL PLANT! THIS IS REAL DYNAMITE!

STOP!

BASTARD! AREN'T YOU ASHAMED ?!

DYNAMITE #3

... WHAT?!

YOU STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND? ... WHEN I LEFT YOU, I WAS ABLE TO GET MY JOB BACK AT THE BANK! I WAS ABLE TO START A NEW LIFE!

YOU STOP, TOO!

JUST GO AHEAD IF YOU FEEL LIKE IT!

SHUT UP! I DON'T GIVE A DAMN! IF YOU DON'T COME BACK WITH ME, I'M BLOWING US ALL UP!!

...WE'RE GONNA MAKE MUSH OUT OF YOU WAY BEFORE YOU BLOW US ALL UP!

BUT BELIEVE ME... IF YOU CAN DITCH YOUR OWN KIDS THAT EASILY...

Don Don

GET BACK DOWN!

GO AHEAD! BLOW EVERY-THING UP!

HE SAID TO OUR FACE THAT HE WOULD ABANDON HIS KIDS WITHOUT ANY REGRET!!!
THAT'S REAL DYNAMITE! DON'T TRY TO BE HEROES NOW!
HIRO! NORI!

ACT IV: CIRCUS * HIRO AND NORI
CHAPTER THREE
"THEY MAKE THEIR ENTRANCE"

BLAM!

CENTRAL BANK

CENTRAL BANK

MY EARS!

FHHHHHH

AHH!

HEY! YOU TWO!

FOLLOW ME!

LOOK, FUSAE!

I EVEN MADE A TIME BOMB!

I'LL TURN ANYONE WHO STANDS IN MY WAY TO DUST! UNDERSTOOD?!

HE HE HE ...

...SO?! ARE WE GETTING BACK TO-GETHER?

...IS THAT IT?!

WHAT? YOU PREFER THAT I PRESS THIS LITTLE BUTTON HERE?

WHAT?! ... NO! NO WAY!

YOU'RE GONNA BE MY HOSTAGES! AND YOU'RE GONNA CARRY MY BOXES!

I'M GOING TO THE ROOF TO TALK IT OUT WITH MY WIFE!

IT'S A LITTLE STUFFY IN HERE.

I'LL COME WITH YOU.

STOP!

HA HA HA!!! I DON'T THINK SO!

HE'S COMPLETELY CRAZY!

SAH

!

SHIRO-GANE!

SHIRO-GANE...

YOU DON'T HAVE TO TAKE OUR PLACE, SHIROGANE!

WAIT!

ONE GIRL IS EASIER TO HANDLE THAN TWO BOYS,

NO?

WHO ARE YOU?

...SHUT UP!

I BEG OF YOU!

HURRY UP! TAKE THIS BOX AND FOLLOW ME!!!

GO!

I UNDERSTAND THAT THE YOUNG MASTER...

...DOES NOT WANT YOU TO GET HURT.

BUT... SHIROGANE!

DON'T WORRY...

DON'T WORRY, KIDS! IT'S NOTHING!

CENTRAL BANK

BANK

PHOTOS 76

THE HOSTAGE TAKER IS CURRENTLY ON THE ROOF OF THE BANK BUILDING.

..WITH ONE OF ITS EMPLOYEES, WHO WE ARE TOLD IS HIS EX-WIFE, AND ONE OF THE CLIENTS..

THE CULPRIT IS WEARING A BELT CARRYING TWENTY STICKS OF DYNAMITE, WHICH HE CAN DETONATE AT ANY TIME

. THANKS TO A SMALL DETONATOR HE IS HOLDING IN HIS LEFT HAND..

THIS MAN IS A WELL-KNOWN ALCOHOLIC, AND USED TO WORK IN A CHEMICAL PLANT THAT MANUFACTURED EXPLOSIVES. HIS WIFE LEFT HIM SIX MONTHS AGO, AND HE WAS PROBABLY TRYING TO FIND A WAY TO WIN HER BACK AND TO TAKE REVENGE FOR THIS FORCED SEPARATION.

THE MADMAN IS IN POSSESSION OF A TIME BOMB!

FURTHERMORE, ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT CONFIRMED, WE ARE TOLD THAT

DYNAMITE #3

THE FUSE WICK IS CUT VERY SHORT TO ACCELERATE THE DETONATION

HE ALSO HAS A BOX OF DYNAMITE STICKS.

DYNAMITE #3

THE WIRE CONNECTING THE DETONATOR TO THE DYNAMITE IS TAPED TO HIS ARM...

STOP! I BEG OF YOU!

YOU HAVE THAT MUCH TIME TO DECIDE WHETHER TO COME BACK TO ME OR NOT!

LOOK! THIS BOMB WILL EXPLODE IN 15 MINUTES!

I HAVE TO STAY ALIVE... FOR THE CHILDREN!

I'LL COME BACK TO YOU.

FINE... I AGREE!

YOU HAVE 14 MINUTES LEFT...

YOU DON'T KNOW ALL I'VE HAD TO ENDURE FOR YOU! YOU NEVER KEPT YOUR PROMISES AND YOU EVEN HIT THE CHILDREN!

PLEASE! ... I WANT YOU TO DIE WITH ME!

FUSAE!!!

IT'S USELESS.

THIS MAN DOES NOT BELIEVE ANYTHING ANYMORE.

WHAT?

NO! ANYWAY, I TOLD YOU I WAS COMING BACK TO YOU! ISN'T THAT WHAT YOU WANTED?!

FUSAE ...

YOU'RE SEEING ANOTHER MAN... AREN'T YOU?

STOP SQUIRMING LIKE THAT! SETTLE DOWN!

CENTRAL BANK

I'M GONNA SAVE HER! I'VE GOTTA SAVE HER! LET ME GO!

WHAT DID YA THINK YOU'D DO?

BALAN DALAN

NO! I WANNA GO!

I SHOULDN'T HAVE LET SHIROGANE GO!

MOMMY !

DON'T YOU GET IT?! ... THAT'S EXACTLY HOW MOM DIED!!!

SHIROGANE SAID...

... "DON'T WORRY"!

SHOOT! ME NEITHER ...

FINE! BUT FIRST, LISTEN TO ME!

WE NEVER WANNA LIVE THROUGH THAT AGAIN!

WE'RE SICK OF IT!

I THINK WE'VE GOT ENOUGH.

BO DOOOON

HEY! WAIT!

EXCUSE ME, BUT COULD WE BORROW ALL OF YOUR PLASTIC CRATES FOR FIVE MINUTES ?!

WHOA! I CAN SEE EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS ON THE ROOF FROM HERE!

OKAY, LET'S DO THIS!

ZOINNG

YEAH!

PIAK

KARIN

BOLANG

KARIN

BE CAREFUL, NORI!

HOP

YES, BUT...

THAT'S A DAMN RISKY IDEA THAT MASARU CAME UP WITH...

ZOH !!!

TIC TIC

...HE WOULD NEVER HAVE TOLD YOU IF HE DIDN'T COMPLETELY BELIEVE IN HIRO AND NORI.

UH...

SINCE IT'S HOT UP HERE... I'VE BROUGHT YOU SOME REFRESH-MENTS...

I'M BEGGING YOU... PLEASE STOP...

...GO BOOM!

HA HA! FIVE MORE MINUTES, THEN YOU AND I...

SAH

WHO'S THERE ?!

GLUPS

AH...

I'VE BROUGHT SOME BEERS, TOO...

LISTEN, BRAT!

WE DON'T WANT ANYTHING! GET LOST!

ANYWAY, YOU'RE GONNA DIE SOON.

YOUR WIFE AND I ARE THIRSTY ...

IF YOU'D ALLOW US...

YOUNG MASTER ...

NORI, YOU'RE GOOD AT CLIMBING UP STACKED CHAIRS, SO...

ALL RIGHT ...

COME HERE ...

...WE'RE GOING TO FIND YOU CRATES SO YOU CAN CLIMB UP TO THE ROOF TO CATCH SHIRO-GANE OR THE OTHER LADY.

NO!

OH

KARIN

KARIN

KARIN

KARIN

NO

WILL YOU GIVE IT A TRY?

BUT...

IT SURELY WON'T BE EASY...

MR. NAKAMACHI TOLD ME YOU WERE REALLY GOOD WITH ROPES...

IN 1

ZOING

YES...

I'LL TAKE THE CHAL-LENGE!

BUT WILL YOU TRY?

IT'S DANGEROUS ...

YOU'RE GOING TO JUMP AND SWING YOURSELF FROM A ROPE TO CATCH SHIROGANE OR THE OTHER LADY.

IF YOU ASK THIS TO A CIRCUS ARTIST ...

HOW COULD HE EVER REFUSE?

MASARU!!

BLA BLA

HEY, LOOK! WHAT'S THAT?!

WHOAAAAA!

KARIN

LOOK UP THERE! NEAR THE ROOF!

...YOU'LL BE THE ONE WHO'S MOST AT RISK!

MASARU, ACTUALLY ...

I'LL RUN REALLY FAST!

ME?

MASARU, HOW WILL YOU GET AWAY?

BEER!

HE HE!

BEER ...

...

THANKS!

SCHRA-

DAH

YOUNG MASTER! WATCH OUT!

COME WITH ME, SHIROGANE! DON'T WORRY ABOUT...

...MASARU...

WOM

!

CLIC

CLIC

WHY DIDN'T IT BLOW UP?!

...SHOOT! THAT BRAT CUT THE WIRES!

THEY SAVED ONE OF THE HOSTAGES!

HOORAY!!

FUSAE!!! NO!!!

ZOT

TIC TIC TIC TIC TIC TIC

DAMN BRAT! YOU'VE RUINED MY PLAN! YOU'RE GONNA PAY FOR THIS!!!

SHIROGANE!!! NO!!!

YOUNG MASTER!

AAAHH!!

CENTRAL BANK

ACT IV: CIRCUS * HIRO AND NORI

CHAPTER FOUR

"END OF THEIR TURN"

NOOO !!! DON'T !!!

DAZ

SHIRO-GANE!

ZAAN

NORI! CATCH MASARU!

WOW

AH!

SPAF!

AHAHA

DODO

EEEK!

YEOW!

CENTRAL BANK

LOOK ALL THE WAY UP THERE!

MASARU! SHIRO-GANE!

HIRO! NORI! ... WHERE ARE THEY?!

GRRR

HIROOO !!!

DOOOH

AAAH! THEY'RE FALLING! THEY'RE GONNA DIE!

AH!

HYAAAA!!!!

HNN!

SCR

GLONG

THE ROPE!

IT'S UNRAV-ELING!

FLAP

FLAP

HIRO!

NORI!
I CAN'T SEE!

THEY'RE GONNA CRASH AGAINST THE SCAFFOLDING!

VOM

PAT

SHÖOT !!!

HOOOHH!!!

BALANG

VOM

KARIN

TAN TAN TAN

SCHRA

OOPS!

OOPS

KARIN

KARIN

KARIN

IT'S OUR FAULT AGAIN!!! WE COULDN'T SAVE HER!!!

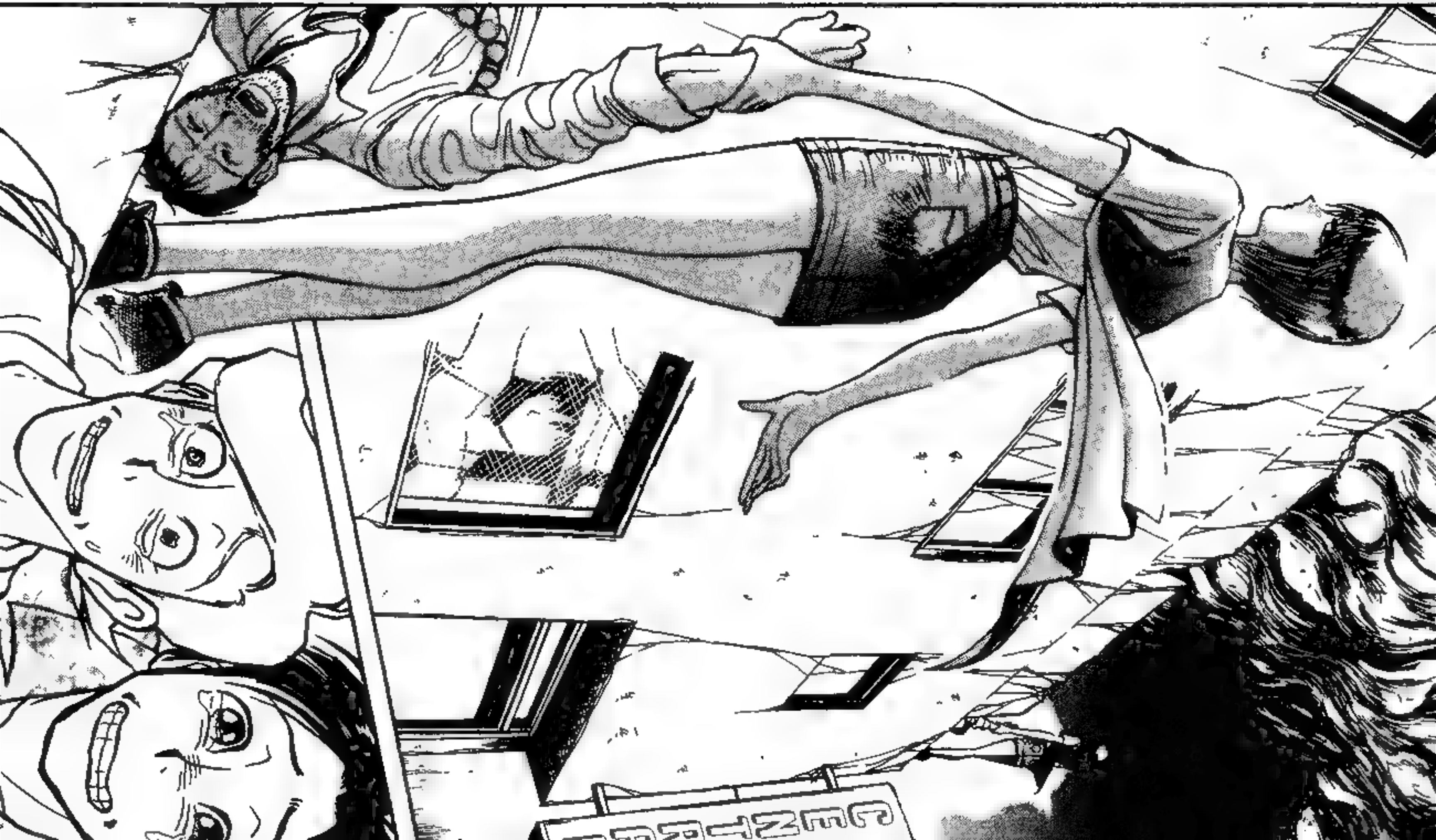
NOOO!!! WHY DID SHE HAVE TO DIE, TOO?!

SHIRO-GANE...

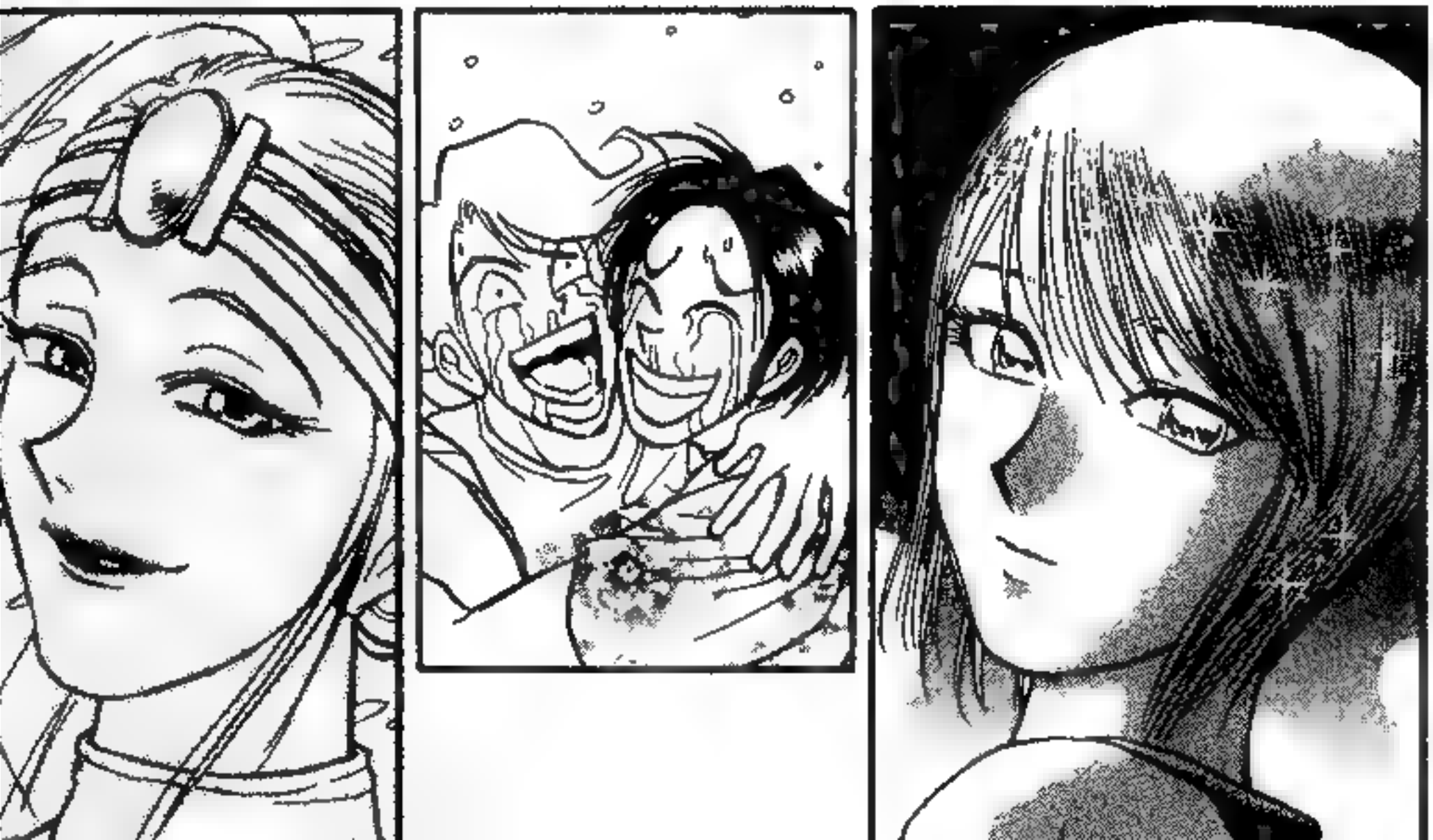
...ISN'T DEAD.

HUH ?

NO, YOU'RE WRONG ...



HORAAAY!!



PIN PON

PIN PON

HOW ABOUT YOU, SHIROGANE?

I'M SO RELIEVED... I WASN'T SURE IF YOU'D MANAGE IT!

SPAT!!

HEY!

BUT ...

TAN

SHIRO-GANE... YOU'RE ALL RIGHT ...

YOU... SLAPPED ME!

SHI RO-GANE...

...YOU WOULD BE DEAD BY NOW!!!

WITHOUT EVEN THINKING WHETHER YOU COULD DO IT OR NOT!

YOUNG MASTER... YOU DID SOMETHING EXTREMELY DANGEROUS...

IF NORI HAD NOT CAUGHT YOU...

A PUPPETEER NEVER TRIES TO HANDLE A PUPPET THAT REQUIRES SKILLS BEYOND HER ABILITY!

I AM SORRY, YOUNG MASTER, BUT...

I WOULD DO ANY-THING TO PROTECT YOU! I WOULD GIVE MY LIFE!

BUT IF YOU WILLINGLY RUN TO YOUR DEATH, HOW CAN I SAVE YOU?!

I'M SORRY, SHIROGANE...

I...

YOUNG MASTER, PLEASE UNDERSTAND... IF ANYTHING WERE TO HAPPEN TO YOU, MY LIFE WOULD LOSE ALL MEANING!

... AH!

...WHAT A WOMAN!

WHAT A MOVING SCENE!

I UNDER-STAND ...

YES...

HE SAID HE'D LEFT HOME BECAUSE HIS DAD WAS VIOLENT...

HE USED HIS BODY TO PROTECT ME WHEN THE BOMB EX-PLODED!

YOU THINK THAT'S WHAT HE DID TO HIM?!

DID YOU SEE HIS BACK?!

WHEN YOU DECIDED ON WHO WOULD SAVE WHO BEFORE CLIMBING UP, YOU BOTH SAID...

SAY, BOYS... I'VE GOT A QUESTION FOR YOU.

GULP

HUH ?!

I'LL TAKE CARE OF THE OTHER LADY!

YES?

HE'S RIGHT! EVERYONE IS SAFE, AFTER ALL.

LISTEN, SHIROGANE ... YOU SHOULD FORGIVE HIM...

SHUT UP!

SHUT UP! DON'T EVER MENTION IT! IF SHIROGANE HEARS ABOUT IT, SHE'LL DEFINITELY GET ANGRY!

I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND, EITHER! YOU BOTH LIKE SHIROGANE, SO...

IN THE END, WE HAD TO DRAW LOTS!

... WELL ...

IN FACT ...

AND WHY IS THAT?

WE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE TERRIBLE...

...IF THEY LOST THEIR MOM.

SINCE THAT LADY HAD KIDS...

I KNOW ...

SORRY, SHIROGANE! IT'S NOT THAT WE DIDN'T WANNA SAVE YOU!

...AT ME!!!

SHE SMILED! LOOK! SHE SMILED...

YOU BOTH ARE WONDERFUL BOYS.

COME ON, WE HAVE TO GO...

ARE YOU KIDDING?! SHE WAS LOOKING AT ME!

PIF PAF POF

IT'S ME SHE SMILED AT!

STOP REPEATING WHAT OTHERS SAY LIKE A PARROT!

SHUT UP! YOU DON'T KNOW NOTHIN'! YOU'RE JUST A KID!

PUF

PIF PAF

IT'S BECAUSE YOU'RE BOTH "WONDERFUL BOYS"!

WHAT'S UP WITH YOU?! WHY ARE YOU SO HAPPY?!

ALRIGHT!

YES...

YOU WANT A LITTLE BROTHER??

"WHAT?!

COME BACK HERE !!!

"I COULD DO SOME ACROBATICS WITH HIM!"

"SO, WE WANT A LITTLE BROTHER TOO, MOM!"

"THAT'S TRUE."

"YEAH! MR. KAZUYA'S BABY IS REALLY CUTE!"

I'LL ASK THE CHIEF...

"HA HA HA! VERY WELL..."

...A LITTLE BROTHER"

...TO FIND YOU...

ACT V: CIRCUS * MASARU AT THE CIRCUS

"FIRST PART"

WELCOME, EVERYONE!

THE STRAW CIRCUS IS FINALLY HERE!

TADAN

HA HA HA

TAN

Straw Circus

WELCOME TO THE STRAW CIRCUS

WOW!

WE WILL BE STARTING SOON!

OUR UNIQUE SHOW WILL PLEASE CHILDREN AND ADULTS ALIKE!

KOJI, YUMI, IS THIS YOUR FIRST TIME, TOO?

...AND YOU WERE PLANNING TO JOIN OUR GROUP?!

THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'VE SEEN A REAL CIRCUS SHOW.

HI!

TODAY, WE'VE COME TO WATCH A SHOW PUT ON BY A BIG CIRCUS!

LOOK! THERE'S A GIRAFFE!

LET'S GO SEE IT!

...
YES
...

THIS LADY'S NAME IS FUSAE...

SOMETIMES I CANNOT TELL WHAT MY CHILDREN REALLY WANT.

I MUST NOT BE A VERY GOOD MOTHER...

DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT! IT WAS MY FATHER WHO GAVE US THE TICKETS FOR THE CIRCUS. ANYWAYS, IT'S BEEN SUCH A LONG TIME SINCE I TOOK THE CHILDREN TO SEE A NICE SHOW LIKE THIS...

I MUST THANK YOU AGAIN FOR OFFERING US THESE SEATS, MISS... IT'S TOO KIND OF YOU.

HER HUSBAND TRIED TO BLOW THEM BOTH UP...

...BUT THANKS TO HIRO AND NORI'S COURAGE AND SKILL, THEY MANAGED TO SAVE HER!

SHE WAS TAKEN HOSTAGE IN A BOMBING INCIDENT.

WELL... IT'S A CONTINUATION OF THIS UNEXPECTED STORY...

ARE YOU WONDERING WHY WE ARE AT A CIRCUS?

IF YOU HADN'T BEEN THERE... MY DAUGHTER WOULD BE DEAD BECAUSE OF HER STUPID HUSBAND!

I REALLY DON'T KNOW... HOW TO THANK YOU...

SIR, PLEASE DON'T WORRY... IT WAS NOTHING!

I HEARD HE IS ONE OF THE "NOBLES" OF THE REGION (I'M NOT TOO SURE WHAT THAT MEANS) ...HE INVITED US TO LUNCH.

THIS MAN IS MISS FUSAE'S FATHER. HE WAS VERY GRATEFUL THAT WE SAVED HIS DAUGHTER.

SNIF

IF SOMETHING THAT HORRIBLE HAD HAPPENED...

...MY GRANDCHILDREN SURELY WOULD HAVE BEEN HEARTBROKEN!

WHAT!? YOU'RE ALL CIRCUS PEOPLE!?

NOW I UNDER-STAND!

AND THERE ...

I'M GOING TO HELP YOU!

VERY WELL!

PAF

IN ORDER TO HAVE ONE, WE HAVE TO BE ON THE CIRCUS UNION LIST. SINCE WE WEREN'T PERFORMING ANYMORE, WE WERE TAKEN OFF THEIR LIST...

YES, BUT NOW, WE DON'T HAVE A TENT ANYMORE. WE'RE A POOR CIRCUS. WE CAN'T DO STREET SHOWS EITHER...

I'M GOING TO HELP YOU GET YOUR SHOW UP IN OUR TOWN!

UNFORTUNATELY, IT WAS NOT AS EASY AS WE THOUGHT...

WE HAVE NO TENT, NO LIGHTS AND NO STAGE! HOW CAN WE HAVE A SHOW?

HMMM ...

WE'LL NEVER MAKE IT!

ALL WE HAVE ARE TWO SORRY CHAIRS...

I CAN'T IMAGINE A SHOW WITHOUT EVEN A STAGE, EITHER ...

I'VE NEVER DONE THAT BEFORE.

Straw Circus

... BUT WE CAN'T DO ANY-THING!

SHOOT! IT'S SO STUPID! WE HAVE A PLACE TO HAVE OUR SHOW...

I ALSO HAVE TICKETS! MISS FUSAE'S DAD GAVE THEM TO US!

THE "STRAW CIRCUS"? WHERE DID YOU GET THIS FLYER?

A BIG CIRCUS LIKE THIS MUST COST A LOT OF MONEY...

OBVIOUSLY, IN ORDER TO PUT UP A SHOW, WE REALLY NEED A LOT OF MATERIALS!

I'M GONNA GO ASK HIM TO LEND US SOME MATERIALS ...

...I WORKED WITH MITSU'USHI, THE BOSS OF THIS CIRCUS.

A LONG TIME AGO...

... I CAN ONLY GO WATCH THE SHOW WITH MSS FUSAE'S CHILDREN, WHOM I'D JUST MET.

SINCE I CAN'T DO ANYTHING FOR MR. NAKAMACHI...

SO THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED.

SERVIC

RATIF

BUREAU

DO YOU WANT TO DRINK SOMETHING, KOJI? AND YOU, YUMI, DO YOU LIKE POPCORN?

KOJI IS 8

AND YUMI IS 7. THEY ARE RATHER SHY.

HERE, YUMI. I HAVE STRAW-BERRY CANDIES!

DON'T WORRY, IT'S ALRIGHT! IT MAY BE BETTER NOT TO DRINK ANYTHING NOW. WE MIGHT NEED TO GO PEE DURING THE SHOW!

COME NOW, CHILDREN! IT'S OKAY TO ACCEPT WHAT MASARU IS SO KINDLY OFFERING!

NO... THANK YOU...

...

HER CHILDREN HAVE TO TRANSFER TO ANOTHER SCHOOL ...

...AND YOUNG MASTER FINDS IT VERY SAD.

MISS FUSAE HAS TO MOVE...

... BECAUSE OF HER EX-HUSBAND!

IT'S SO VERY LIKE HIM!

MASARU IS TRYING REAL HARD TO PUT THEM AT EASE...

...IS NO FUN!

CHANGING SCHOOLS ...

FROM WHAT I UNDERSTAND, THEIR DAD HAS BROUGHT THEM NOTHING BUT TROUBLE...

OH! MY LITTLE MASARU ...

SHIRO-GANE...

...I'D LIKE TO MAKE THEM SMILE AGAIN!

TAN TAN TAN TAN

THEY CAN'T BECOME HAPPY IN JUST ONE DAY'S TIME.

I'VE NEVER SEEN THEM SMILE...

HERE YOU GO! I'VE GOT SAUSAGES FOR YOU!

THEY WERE RIGHT!

...THAT EVERY TIME SHE AND HER EX-HUSBAND ARGUED, KOJI WOULD CALM THE SOBBING YUMI.

MISS FUSAE TOLD ME, IN TEARS...

IT WOULD BE NORMAL IF I COULDN'T MAKE THEM FIND SOME MEASURE OF HAPPINESS AGAIN...

IT'S IMPOS-SIBLE!

WE HAVE OUR OWN SHOWS TO PUT TOGETHER, TOO!

HEY! MR. NAKAMACHI FOUND THE BOSS OF THIS CIRCUS!

BUREA

I'M SORRY, BUT THAT'S NOT POSSIBLE!

ANYWAYS, I'M SURPRISED THAT YOU STILL WISH TO STAY IN THE CIRCUS WORLD!

I UNDER-STAND, BUT...

...JUST A LIGHTING RAMP, OR A COUPLE OF POLES FOR ATTACHING WIRES, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO GIVE US AT LEAST THAT MUCH!

I CAN'T LEND YOU ANYTHING!

THIS IS NOT YOUR FIRST FLOP...

PLUS, NOBODY WILL WANT TO WORK WITH YOU!

FOLLOW MY ADVICE AND GIVE IT UP!

A "STONE EATER"... CHANGED INTO AN "OGRE"!

M..?

WHAT LIES?

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

NORI, HIRO! THAT'S ENOUGH!

STILL, YOU ACCUSE OUR BOSS OF...

STOP WITH THE LIES ALREADY !!!

SAY, BOYS! WHY DON'T YOU COME AND WORK FOR ME? DUMP THE OLD MAN, HE'S GOT NO FUTURE!

IT'S ALRIGHT... ANYWAY, I SHOULDN'T HAVE COME HERE TO ASK FOR HELP ...

BUT, BOSS!

I AM DEEPLY SORRY FOR WHAT HAPPENED ...

ARE YOU COMING BACK TO THE CIRCUS, SHIRO-GANE?!

GRRRR !!!

OH! THAT'S ...

THAT'S RIGHT! IT WAS THIS CIRCUS! IT WAS IN THIS TENT THAT I MET SHIRO-GANE FOR THE FIRST TIME!

HUH?

SHIRO-GANE... YOU'VE WORKED IN THIS CIRCUS!?

WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?

UM... IN TRUTH...

NO PROBLEM! IT'S NOTHING! I'M SO GLAD YOU CHOSE TO COME BACK TO US! NAOTA! COME HERE!

I AM SORRY.

WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU, MY LITTLE SHIROGANE? THE DAY THAT TRAIN CRASHED INTO OUR TENT...

...YOU SUDDENLY DISAPPEARED!

HAHAHA!!!

AH...

WHAT IS IT, DAD?

BOOTLEG

MY BELOVED SHIROGANE! YOU'VE FINALLY DECIDED TO COME BACK AND WORK WITH ME?!

GRROOAR!!!

HUH? AND THERE'S HIRO AND NORI.

HEY!!! YOU DISGUSTING PIG!

GET AWAY FROM SHIROGANE!

HAHAHA!!! NO, YOU MORON!!!

BUT... SHIROGANE! YOU DIDN'T COME BACK TO WORK WITH US?!

THESE PEOPLE ARE FROM THE NAKAMACHI CIRCUS... I WORK WITH THEM AT THE MOMENT.

SAHooo

OH!

YOUR ACROBATICS NUMBER WITH NAOTA WAS A CIRCUS FAVORITE! DON'T YOU REMEMBER?

SHIROGANE... I DON'T UNDERSTAND!

BOSS! COME QUICKLY!

LET GO OF HER HAND!

COME ON, SHIROGANE! WE'RE GONNA DO THIS TOGETHER AGAIN, RIGHT? THEN...

IT'S THE LUNCH THEY HAD...

THE CLOWNS AND ACROBATS ARE DOUBLED OVER IN PAIN!

SOME OF THE PERFORMERS ARE SICK! I THINK IT'S FOOD POISONING!

DON'T RUN! THE SPECTATORS WILL WONDER WHAT'S GOING ON!

?

BUT... WHAT ABOUT MY ACROBATICS NUMBER, THEN?!

WAAAAAAAAA!!

ZAAN

GRRR

THE SHOW STARTS IN 15 MINUTES ...

...SHIRO-GANE, WE BEG YOU!

BLA BLA

...EVEN FOR SHIRO-GANE.

IT'S NOT GONNA BE EASY...

YEAH. WHAT I'M MOST WORRIED ABOUT IS THAT STUPID NAOTA WHO'S PROBABLY GONNA TRY TO FEEL HER UP!

FOR HER NUMBER, I'M SURE SHE'LL DO VERY WELL!

...SHE COULDN'T SAY NO!

BUT, SINCE SHE DISAPPEARED SO SUDDENLY...

IT'S THE FIRST TIME SHE'S TALKED TO ME!

YES? WHAT IS IT, YUMI?

ARE WE GOING TO SEE SHIRO-GANE?

ZOW

YOU, TOO, KOJI! WATCH HER CAREFULLY!

YES! WATCH FOR HER, BECAUSE SHE'S AN EXTRAORDINARY ARTIST!

UMM... MAYBE THERE ISN'T THAT MUCH TO GET EXCITED ABOUT...

SAY, MR. NAKA-MACHI ...

HMM...

THAT'S MINE!

TON

GIVE ME THAT!

SORRY!

CLAC

SAH

IN THE END, YOU'LL HEAR ABOUT IT SOONER OR LATER... SO I'D RATHER TELL YOU MYSELF.

YES!

SHIRO-GANE, ARE YOU READY?

I'M GOING TO TELL YOU HOW AND WHY THE NAKAMACHI CIRCUS WENT UNDER...

IT'S AN UNBELEVABLE STORY...

ACT V: CIRCUS * MASARU AT THE CIRCUS

"PART TWO"

YOU'LL END UP HEARING ABOUT IT ANYWAY, SO ..

I'M GONNA TELL YOU EVERY-THING.

BLA BLA

TO MANY PEOPLE, I'M KNOWN NOT AS A "STONE EATER..."

BLA BLA

..BUT AS A "MAN EATER"!

I WAS ON A BUS, AND WE GOT INTO A BAD ACCIDENT.

...AND INFLICTED CONSIDERABLE DESTRUCTION!

FIVE YEARS AGO--THAT IS, TWO YEARS AFTER FUSAE'S DEATH--A TYPHOON HIT THE CHUGOKU REGION...

OH?

YOU MEAN... YOU EAT... PEOPLE?!

I ONLY HAPPENED TO BE THERE BECAUSE I WAS ACCOMPANYING SOMEONE. THE BUS WAS FULL OF REGULAR PASSENGERS ...

THE BUS VEERED OFF THE ROAD BECAUSE OF THE WIND AND FELL INTO A RAVINE ..

AMONG THE 40 PASSENGERS IN THE BUS, I WAS THE ONLY SURVIVOR.

NO...

SO THERE WAS NOBODY ELSE FROM YOUR CIRCUS?

ALAS, I WAS THE ONLY ONE!

AND YET, I STILL TRIED TO FIND OTHER SURVIVORS...

BOTH OF MY LEGS WERE BROKEN ...

WOOMM

I WAS TOTALLY EXHAUSTED

AND JUST SAT THERE FOR FIVE DAYS.

I FOUND A PLACE UNDER A ROCKY OUT-CROPPING TO PROTECT MYSELF FROM THE RAIN... I COULDN'T MOVE ANYMORE.

SCHHH

SO... HUNGRY ...

FLIC

FLOC

CRUNCH

CRUNCH

I'VE ONLY GOT... THIS...

THERE WERE PLENTY OF THEM IN LONDON AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 18TH CENTURY! SOME EVEN ATE FIRE-PLACE POKERS.

BUT I'M NOT THE FIRST STONE EATER IN HISTORY!

YES! I HAD MADE MY NAME AS A STONE EATER.

SO... YOU ATE STONES?!

..ME?

DO YOU DO THAT TOO?

A MAN NAMED BATTALIA ATE NINE POUNDS OF ROCK EVERY DAY. PEOPLE SAID THAT EVERY THREE WEEKS, HE LET OUT A LOT OF SAND!

HE CLAIMED HE LIKED THE TASTE OF ROCKS!

STONE E

The only on

Frank Battalia

A STONE DOESN'T HAVE ANY NUTRITIONAL VALUE!

BUT TO FIGHT HUNGER... I ATE SOME...

AND I SURVIVED ...

I DID IT ONLY FOR MY ACT!

I HAVE STRONG TEETH AND AN OUTSTANDING DIGESTIVE SYSTEM, THAT'S ALL! I'VE NEVER LIKED THE TASTE OF STONES ...

MANY LANDSLIDES HAD BLOCKED THE ROADS AND DELAYED THEIR EFFORTS TO GET THERE.

THE RESCUE TEAMS FOUND OUR BUS FIVE DAYS LATER...

HOW DID MR. NAKAMACHI MANAGE TO SURVIVE IN THIS RAVINE WITH NO FOOD AROUND?!

THE PRESS STARTED TALKING ABOUT ME.

I WAS THE ONLY SURVIVOR.

I LEARNED THIS MUCH LATER...

...HAD BEEN EATEN BY WILD ANIMALS.

MOST OF THE BODIES OF THE OTHER PASSENGERS

DESPITE THE MANY EXPERTS' OPINIONS TO THE CONTRARY, THE GOSSIP MAGAZINES WENT WILD WITH IT.

Amazing!!!
Stranded stone eater survives road accident by feeding on the bodies of other victims!!!

HORROR AT THE CIRCUS

MR. NAKAMACHI

BECAUSE OF THAT...

I TOOK IT BADLY..

I COULDN'T STAND ANSWERING THE REPORTERS WHEN EVERYBODY HAD OBVIOUSLY MADE UP THEIR MINDS.

PEOPLE SIMPLY ASSUMED THAT IF I COULD EAT STONES, I COULD EAT PEOPLE AS WELL!

YOU COULDN'T PROVE THAT THE PASSENGERS HAD BEEN EATEN BY ANIMALS?

THE REPUTATION OF THE NAKAMACHI CIRCUS SUFFERED A LOT BECAUSE OF ME, OUR AUDIENCE BECAME SPARSE AT BEST.

NAKAMACHI CIRCUS BLAMED

VICTIMS FAMILIES ANGRY

A STONE EATER

NAKAMACHI CIRCUS: A GATHERING OF KILLERS?

I BECAME VIOLENT AND WAS ARRESTED.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE SHOW IS ABOUT TO START!!!

DING

BUT ONE DAY, THERE WAS NOBODY LEFT.

BEFORE, SPECTATORS CAME IN THRONGS...

ACCORDING TO THE MEDIA, I WAS A DANGEROUS PSYCHOPATH, A CRIMINAL... PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF MY CIRCUS WAS A CATASTROPHE!

ONE AFTER ANOTHER, OUR ARTISTS LEFT US ...

AND I COULDN'T DO ANY-THING ABOUT IT.

IN SHORT...

THEY TOLD ME: "NAKAMACHI, WE FEEL THAT YOU NO LONGER HAVE THE RIGHT TO WORK IN THE CIRCUS WORLD!"

...

PEOPLE IN THE CIRCUS WORLD ARGUED PASSIONATELY ABOUT ME...

...AND I ENDED UP BEING BANNED FROM EVERY SINGLE ENTER-TAINMENT SYNDICATE.

SAY

YOU WON'T BE DISAP-POINTED, MASARU!

IT'S STARTING!

AH!

BUT...

I REALIZED THAT IF I WANNA PUT TOGETHER A NEW CIRCUS, I SHOULD EXPECT MANY OBSTACLES!

TODAY, WHEN I TALKED TO MITSU'USHI,

BUT I REALIZE NOW THAT MANY PEOPLE IN THE WORLD HAVE LIVED THROUGH VERY DIFFICULT TIMES...

LIKE MR. NAKAMACHI.

UNTIL I MET MR. NAKAMACHI...

...I THOUGHT I WAS THE ONLY ONE TO HAVE LIVED THROUGH SUCH HARD TIMES.

OR MS. FUSAE, WHO HAS TO RAISE HER CHILDREN ...

...ALL ALONE.

TARANDA ...

HIRO... NORI...

...AND THEIR FATHER'S SELFISHNESS.

AND THEN KOJI AND YUMI, WHO HAD TO LIVE FOR YEARS WITH THEIR MOTHER'S LOVE...

CLAP CLAP

WOW! THIS IS FANTASTIC!

DON'T YOU THINK SO?!

YOU AND NAOTA ARE GONNA BE ABLE TO SHOW US WHAT YOU CAN DO!

SHIROGANE, I'M TRUSTING YOU!

BUT... YOU DISAPPEARED SO ABRUPTLY! DO YOU KNOW ...

...HOW DISAPPOINTED I WAS? I DON'T MEAN TO MAKE YOU FEEL GUILTY... SINCE YOU CAME BACK TO ME ANYWAY! NOW I KNOW THAT I AM IN YOUR HEART!

THE PEOPLE IN OUR CIRCUS CALLED YOU THE "ICE QUEEN" BECAUSE YOU ALWAYS KEPT YOUR DISTANCE FROM OTHERS. BUT I KNOW THAT FOR THE LOVE OF YOUR LIFE, YOUR HEART CAN BE A BLAZING FURNACE!

AND I KNOW THAT TODAY, YOU'VE DECIDED TO RETURN MY FEELINGS!

I'M GOING TO CHANGE OUR NUMBER.

YES.

THREE MONTHS AGO, YOU AND I WERE STARS!

HAHA!!! SHIRO-GANE!!! ARE YOU SERIOUS ?!

IF YOU MANAGE TO DO SO, I WILL RETURN YOUR SO-CALLED "FEELINGS"!

TRY TO HUG ME REALLY HARD DURING OUR PERFORMANCE ...

VERY MUCH SO.

AAH

NAOTA AND MISS SHIROGANE !!!

NOW HERE IS AN ACROBATICS NUMBER...

...BY THE STRAW CIRCUS' MOST BEAUTIFUL COUPLE!

SHUT UP! WATCH THE SHOW!

IT'S HER...

DID YOU HEAR THE AN-NOUNCE-MENT?!

... SHIROGANE WILL FINALLY BE MINE!

IF I HUG HER...

HOP

YES!!! THIS IS IT! FINALLY!

I THINK SHIROGANE PROMISED THAT !DIOT SOME-THING...

HA HA HA

BUT...

TAN

FLAP

HOP

SLAM

HEY, MACHO MAN! LOOKS LIKE YOUR GIRLFRIEND DOESN'T LIKE YOU ANYMORE!

I DON'T KNOW WHY, BUT I LOVE THIS NUMBER!

WW

HA HA

IT'S A VERY DIFFICULT TECHNIQUE THAT EMPHASIZES HER EXTREME FLEXIBILITY.

WOW! HOW CAN SHE HANDLE SO MANY HOOPS AT A TIME? SHE WON'T BE ABLE TO ESCAPE ANYMORE!

BRAWO

OUAF

LIKE A BUTTER-FLY...

I WILL RETURN...

SHIROGANE!

YOUR "FEELINGS"

WAIT!

REALLY HARD..

IF YOU DO SO...

"TRY TO HUG ME...

HAA...

HAA...

SHIROGANE!!

DO DO DO

NO

OHHHH

AS IS MISS FUSAE..

NORI IS LAUGHING OUT LOUD

EVEN MR. NAKAMACHI IS LAUGHING HEARTILY...

AS FOR, KOJI AND YUMI, THEIR EYES ARE SPARKLING...

...IS REALLY AMAZING!!

THE CIRCUS ...

HOUHOUHOUH

ACT V: CIRCUS * MASARU AT THE CIRCUS

"PART THREE"

CURRENTLY, I'M AT THE STRAW CIRCUS... SHIROGANE IS IN THE MIDDLE OF AN ACT BECAUSE SEVERAL OF THE CIRCUS' ARTISTS SUDDENLY BECAME SICK.

OUAIS BRAVO

Straw Circus

WELCOME TO THE STRAW CIRCUS

IT'S MASARU AGAIN!

IT'S MY FIRST TIME SEEING SHIROGANE PERFORM ON A CIRCUS STAGE... AND SHE'S EVEN MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN USUAL!

OUAAHH

HER NUMBER IS ALMOST OVER...

I HAVE TO GET BACK TO IT, BECAUSE I DON'T WANT TO MISS ANYTHING!

IT'S THE FIRST TIME I'VE SEEN HER DO THAT!

...I WONDER HOW SHE'LL FINISH HER NUMBER.

OUAAH!

SHE'S HANGING JUST BY HER ANKLES!

NO!

...SHE COULDN'T BE THINKING OF...

ZOING

SHE SWINGS!

WM WM

...SHE JUMPED !!!

HO

PATAH TA TA TA

-TAW

HOURRA BRAVOO

WHAT A SHOW!

NOW THAT SHE'S DONE, WE CAN ALL BREATHE EASIER!

EVERYONE HELD THEIR BREATH...

IT'S UNBE-LIEVABLE!

DID YOU SEE THAT?!

EVERYONE IS LAUGHING WITH DELIGHT!

THE OTHERS TOO

MR. NAKA-MACHI ...

JUST BY WATCHING SHIRO-GANE'S ACT...

EVEN THOUGH THEY'VE FACED RECENT HARDSHIPS, THEY STARTED SMILING AGAIN...

...THE CIRCUS IS MAGICAL!!!

YOU'RE RIGHT, SHIRO-GANE...

HM...

KOJI AND YUMI'S SMILES!

BUT I'D STILL LIKE TO SEE...

YOU ARE CRUEL, SHIROGANE... YOU DIDN'T LET ME GET CLOSE EVEN ONCE!

YES... SORRY...

THANK YOU...

BRAVO, SHIROGANE! IT WAS MAGNIFI-CENT!

THAT LAST JUMP WAS SO PERFECT! YOU HAD THE AUDIENCE ENTHRALLED!

GOODBYE ...

TAN TAN TAN

UNFORTU-NATELY, I COULDN'T FIND THE RIGHT MOMENT... OH WELL, THERE'S ALWAYS NEXT TIME.

I'M STILL WONDERING IF YOU WEREN'T JUST WAITING FOR ME TO HUG YOU BY SURPRISE...

BY THE WAY, YOU'RE MISSING CLOWNS, TOO...

!

TON

GOOD-BYE.

I AGREED TO DO THIS TODAY ONLY BECAUSE LAST TIME, I LEFT WITHOUT WARNING...

STAY WITH US, SHIROGANE! YOU'LL BE PAID VERY WELL!

THE EASIEST WOULD BE TO PLAY SOME MUSIC WHILE WE READY THE TRAPEZES...

WE CAN FIND ANOTHER WAY!

DON'T WORRY, DAD.

...I SEE...

WELL... UH... YES, THEY ALL HAVE STOMACH-ACHES...

THERE'S ALSO ANOTHER PERSON WHO IS SITTING IN THE AUDIENCE.

ME!

OF YOUR CLOWN ACT, TOO...

DON'T, I'LL TAKE CARE

HUH? BUT WHO WILL BE THE CLOWN?

HIRO, WHERE WERE YOU?

HEHE! IT WAS AWESOME !!!

SHOOT! I COULDN'T SEE SHIRO-GANE!

THE SECOND PART OF OUR SHOW WILL START AFTER A 15-MINUTE INTERMISSION!

TO GO FETCH ARLEQUIN...

SHIROGANE HAD ASKED ME

TARANDA... YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE I CAN ASK THIS OF...

HUH?! ME?

I COULDN'T EVEN IMAGINE WHAT WAS ABOUT TO HAPPEN...

BUT... SHIROGANE'S NUMBER IS ALREADY OVER!

PSS

PSS...

FSHHH

THANK YOU!

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

UNDER-STOOD... I'LL DO IT!

DAN

TON

THE INTER-MISSION IS OVER. THE SHOW IS ABOUT TO START AGAIN.

YES, I'LL KEEP THEM ONLY FOR A FEW MINUTES ...

WHAT?! YOU WERE A TAMER AT THE GREAT LONG CIRCUS?!

ANYWAY, THEY ONLY OBEY ME!

WHY D'YOU WANNA BORROW MY DOGS?!

MEANWHILE, SHIROGANE WILL DO A COMIC NUMBER.

THE SHOW'S CREW IS BUSY PREPARING THE LAST ACT. ACCORDING TO MR. NAKAMACHI, IT'S CALLED THE "SHOWSTOPPER".

BUT IT'S UNDERSTAND-ABLE. WE DON'T HAVE CLOWN SCHOOLS, ALTHOUGH THERE ARE SOME ABROAD.

THERE AREN'T MANY GOOD CLOWNS IN JAPANESE CIRCUSES...

IN JAPAN, IT'S THE OPPOSITE!

IN JAPAN, CLOWNS ARE CALLED "PIERROTS." I FIND IT A LITTLE DEMEANING... IN THE WEST, CLOWNS ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE SHOW. THEIR ART IS WELL RESPECTED.

UNFORTUNATELY, CLOWNS ARE SOMEWHAT DESPISED. PEOPLE ALWAYS SAY, "IF AN ACT GOES WRONG, SEND IN THE CLOWNS!"

THEY LEARN BY THEMSELVES, BY WATCHING THEIR ELDERS...

THEN WHAT DO THOSE WHO WANT TO BECOME CLOWNS DO?

"MY GRANDFATHER...

...WAS A CLOWN!"

HM... IS THAT SO...

HERE I AM! I'M SHIROGANE THE CLOWN!

HELLO, FRIENDS!!!

CLAP CLAP CLAP

FLASH

YAHOO

SHUT UP, YOU IDIOTS!

GO, SHIROGANE! YOU'RE THE BEST!!! YIPPEE!!!

...I'M A CHATTER-BOX.

CLOWNS LIKE TO MIMEI BUT ME...

LISTEN TO THE STORY I'M ABOUT TO TELL YOU!

BEATS ME..

UH, DAD... WHAT IS SHE DOING?

DATATAN

SHE'S VERY KIND AND LOVES DOGS!

TODAY I'M GOING TO TELL YOU A LOVE STORY.

FLASH

OUR MAIN CHARACTER IS THE DAUGHTER OF A MIL LIONAIRE.

OUAH!!

YEAH, TARANDA !!!

HOP HOP HOP!

TA ZAANG

THIS GIRL HAS A BODYGUARD...

...WHO'S A SCARY TEN-FOOT-HIGH GIANT!

BUT TODAY, A BOY IS IN LOVE WITH THE GIRL

SAH...

IS THERE SOMEONE IN THAT HUGE DOLL?!

THIS BOY IS...

FLAP

AND SHE LOVES HIM TOO.

HE'S IN THE AUDIENCE RIGHT NOW!

HAHAHA

SHOOT! I FORGOT!

YOU!
...
THE YOUNG BOY OVER THERE!

WHO WANTS TO BE A PART OF THIS GREAT LOVE STORY?

WHO WANTS TO BE THAT BOY?

DOOH!

I CAN SEE THAT YOU REALLY WANT TO BE IN OUR PLAY!!!

AH ooo

...SHIROGANE!!! YOU AREN'T SERIOUS, ARE YOU?!

WHAT?! BUT!

FINE! OKAY!

"IF I HAD BEEN A CLOWN...

...I DEFINITELY WOULD HAVE MADE PEOPLE LAUGH OUT LOUD..."

KOJI AND YUMI... THEY'RE LOOKING AT ME...

DON'T WORRY ...

I'LL DO MY BEST ...

...SORRY, YOUNG MASTER...

OUAH!

OOH!

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!!! A CHEER FOR OUR LITTLE PRINCE!!!

CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP

YEAH ...

MASARU DOESN'T LOOK VERY AT EASE...

HA HA

OOPS! I PUT A LITTLE TOO MUCH ON!

VLOF

THIS BOY IS A CHIMNEY SWEEPER!

SO WE'LL DIRTY HIM UP A BIT!

...WHILE AVOIDING HER GUARDIAN'S WATCHFUL EYE!

IN THIS STORY, THE YOUNG BOY MUST GIVE A ROSE TO THE LOVE OF HIS LIFE...

LET'S START OUR STORY. FIRST, TAKE THIS ROSE!

NO, NO, NO! IF YOU ARE THAT SHY...

...SHE'LL NEVER KNOW YOUR FEELINGS!

UH ...

AH?

IT'S YOUR TURN!

YOUNG

...THIS!

AT LEAST TRY TO DO...

HA HA HA

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE

...AH!!!

EVEN THOUGH I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT CIRCUSES OR BEING A CLOWN, SHE MANAGED TO MAKE ME A COMIC RELIEF...

SHE HAS SUCH GREAT SHOWMANSHIP THAT SHE INSTINCTIVELY KNOWS HOW TO CATCH PEOPLE'S ATTENTION.

COME ON! PULL THAT LEG HIGHER!

SHIROGANE IS VERY TALENTED!

HA HA HA

THEY'RE LAUGHING OUT LOUD!!!

...KOJI AND YUMI!!!

THE CIRCUS... IT'S REALLY MAGICAL!!!

IT'S CRAZY!

Whoo

...

NARUMI

...

...IT CAN MAKE ANYONE HAPPY!!!

BLACKOUT